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The scheme of Divine Revelation considered, principally in its connection with the progress and improvement of human society;

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IN

EIGHT SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCCXXV.

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY

THE LATE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY

THE REV. GEORGE CHANDLER, LL. D.

LATE FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE;

RECTOR OF SOUTHAM, WARWICKSHIRE; DISTRICT MINISTER OF CHRIST CHURCH, ST. MARY-LE-BONE, LONDON; AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH AND QUEENSBERRY.

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM HOWLEY, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

&c. &c. &c.

THESE DISCOURSES

ARE

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S PERMISSION

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IN TOKEN OF SINCERE RESPECT

FOR HIS MANY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VIRTUES,

BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S

MUCH OBLIGED

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

EXTRACT

FROM

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON,

CANON OF SALISBURY.

——"I give and bequeath my Lands and "Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scho- "lars of the University of Oxford for ever, to "have and to hold all and singular the said "Lands or Estates upon trust, and to the in- "tents and purposes hereinafter mentioned; "that is to say, I will and appoint that the "Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford "for the time being shall take and receive all "the rents, issues, and profits thereof, and (after "all taxes, reparations, and necessary deduc- "tions made) that he pay all the remainder to "the endowment of eight Divinity Lecture "Sermons, to be established for ever in the said "University, and to be performed in the man- "ner following:

"I direct and appoint, that, upon the first "Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly

" chosen by the Heads of Colleges only, and by " no others, in the room adjoining to the Print- " ing-House, between the hours of ten in the " morning and two in the afternoon, to preach " eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year fol- " lowing, at St. Mary's in Oxford, between the " commencement of the last month in Lent " Term, and the end of the third week in Act " Term.

" Also I direct and appoint, that the eight " Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached " upon either of the following Subjects—to con- " firm and establish the Christian Faith, and to " confute all heretics and schismatics—upon the " divine authority of the holy Scriptures—upon " the authority of the writings of the primitive " Fathers, as to the faith and practice of the pri- " mitive Church—upon the Divinity of our Lord " and Saviour Jesus Christ—upon the Divinity " of the Holy Ghost—upon the Articles of the " Christian Faith, as comprehended in the " Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight " Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always " printed, within two months after they are " preached, and one copy shall be given to the " Chancellor of the University, and one copy to " the Head of every College, and one copy to " the Mayor of the city of Oxford, and one

" copy to be put into the Bodleian Library; and
" the expense of printing them shall be paid
" out of the revenue of the Land or Estates
" given for establishing the Divinity Lecture
" Sermons; and the Preacher shall not be paid,
" nor be entitled to the revenue, before they
" are printed.

" Also I direct and appoint, that no person
" shall be qualified to preach the Divinity Lec-
" ture Sermons, unless he hath taken the de-
" gree of Master of Arts at least, in one of the
" two Universities of Oxford or Cambridge;
" and that the same person shall never preach
" the Divinity Lecture Sermons twice."

The list of Bampton Lecturers, with their subjects, is here reprinted from Mr. Miller's publication in 1817, *and continued to the present time.*

1780. James Bandinel, D. D. of Jesus College; Public Orator of the University. The author first establishes " the truth and authority of the scriptures;—for the au- " thenticity of the history being acknowledged, and the " facts which are therein recorded being granted, the tes- " timony of *miracles* and *prophecies*, joined to the *excel-* " *lence of the doctrines*, is a clear and complete demon- " stration of our Saviour's divine commission." P. 37.

1781. Timothy Neve, D. D. Chaplain of Merton College. " The great point which the author has principally at- " tempted to illustrate is, that well known, but too much " neglected truth, that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the " world, and the Redeemer of mankind."

1782. Robert Holmes, M. A. Fellow of New College. " On " the prophecies and testimony of John the Baptist, and " the parallel prophecies of Jesus Christ."

1783. John Cobb, Fellow of St. John's College. The subjects discussed are; " an inquiry after happiness; natu- " ral religion; the Gospel; repentance; faith; profes- " sional faith; practical faith; the Christian's privileges."

1784. Joseph White, B. D. Fellow of Wadham College. " A comparison of Mahometism and Christianity in their " history, their evidence, and their effects."

1785. Ralph Churton, M. A. Fellow of Brasen Nose Col-

lege. " On the prophecies respecting the destruction of " Jerusalem."

1786. George Croft, M. A. late Fellow of University College. " The use and abuse of reason ; objections against " inspiration considered ; the authority of the ancient " Fathers examined; on the conduct of the first Re- " formers ; the charge of intolerance in the Church of " England refuted ; objections against the Liturgy an- " swered ; on the evils of separation ; conjectural re- " marks upon prophecies to be fulfilled hereafter."

1787. William Hawkins, M. A. late Fellow of Pembroke College. " On Scripture mysteries."

1788. Richard Shepherd, D. D. of Corpus Christi College. " The ground and credibility of the Christian re- " ligion."

1789. Edward Tatham, D. D. of Lincoln College. " The " chart and scale of truth."

1790. Henry Kett, M. A. Fellow of Trinity College. " The " object of these Lectures is to rectify the misrepresenta- " tions of Mr. Gibbon and Dr. Priestly, with respect to " the history of the primitive church."

1791. Robert Morres, M. A. late Fellow of Brasen Nose college. On " faith in general ; faith in divine testimony " no subject of question ; internal evidence of the Gospel ; " effects of faith ; religious establishments ; heresies."

1792. John Eveleigh, D. D. Provost of Oriel College. " I " shall endeavour," says the learned author, " first to " state regularly the substance of our religion from its " earliest declarations in the scriptures of both the Old " and New Testament, to its complete publication after

" the resurrection of Christ; secondly, to give a sketch " of the history of our religion from its complete publi- " cation after the resurrection of Christ to the present " times, confining however this sketch, towards the con- " clusion, to the particular history of our own church; " thirdly, to state in a summary manner the arguments " adducible in proof of the truth of our religion; and " fourthly, to point out the general sources of objection " against it."

1793. James Williamson, B. D. of Queen's College. " The " truth, inspiration, authority, and evidence of the Scrip- " tures considered and defended."

1794. Thomas Wintle, B. D. of Pembroke College. " The " expediency, prediction, and accomplishment of the " Christian redemption illustrated."

1795. Daniel Veysie, B. D. Fellow of Oriel College. " The " doctrine of Atonement illustrated and defended."

1796. Robert Gray, M. A. late of St. Mary Hall. " On " the principles upon which the Reformation of the Church " of England was established."

1797. William Finch, LL. D. late Fellow of St. John's Col- lege. " The objections of infidel historians and other " writers against Christianity considered."

1798. Charles Henry Hall, B. D. late Student of Christ Church. " It is the purpose of these discourses to con- " sider at large what is meant by the scriptural expres- " sion, 'fulness of time;' or, in other words, to point " out the previous steps by which God Almighty gra- " dually prepared the way for the introduction and pro- " mulgation of the Gospel." See the Preface.

1799. William Barrow, LL. D. of Queen's College. These Lectures contain " answers to some popular objections " against the necessity or the credibility of the Christian " revelation."

1800. George Richards, M. A. late Fellow of Oriel College. " The divine origin of Prophecy illustrated and de- " fended."

1801. George Stanley Faber, M. A. Fellow of Lincoln College. " Horæ Mosaicæ; or, a view of the Mosaical " records with respect to their coincidence with profane " antiquity, their internal credibility, and their connec- " tion with Christianity."

1802. George Frederic Nott, B. D. Fellow of All Souls' College. " Religious Enthusiasm considered."

1803. John Farrer, M. A. of Queen's College. " On the " mission and character of Christ, and on the Beati- " tudes."

1804. Richard Laurence, LL. D. of University College. " An attempt to illustrate those Articles of the Church of " England which the Calvinists improperly consider as " Calvinistical."

1805. Edward Nares, M. A. late Fellow of Merton College. " A view of the evidences of Christianity at the close of " the pretended age of reason."

1806. John Browne, M. A. late Fellow of Corpus Christi College. In these Lectures the following principle is variously applied in the vindication of religion ; that " there " has been an infancy of the species, analogous to that " of the individuals of whom it is composed, and that the

" infancy of human nature required a different mode of " treatment from that which was suitable to its advanced " state."

1807. Thomas le Mesurier, M. A. late Fellow of New College. " The nature and guilt of Schism considered with " a particular reference to the principles of the Reforma- " tion."

1808. John Penrose, M. A. of Corpus Christi College. " An " attempt to prove the truth of Christianity from the wis- " dom displayed in its original establishment, and from " the history of false and corrupted systems of religion."

1809. John Bayley Somers Carwithen, M. A. of St. Mary Hall. " A view of the Brahminical religion in its confir- " mation of the truth of the sacred history, and in its in- " fluence on the moral character."

1810. Thomas Falconer, M. A. of Corpus Christi College. " Certain principles in Evanson's ' Dissonance of the four " generally received Evangelists,' &c. examined."

1811. John Bidlake, D. D. of Christ Church. " The truth " and consistency of divine revelation; with some re- " marks on the contrary extremes of Infidelity and Enthu- " siasm."

1812. Richard Mant, M. A. late Fellow of Oriel College. " An appeal to the Gospel; or an inquiry into the jus- " tice of the charge, alleged by Methodists and other ob- " jectors, that the Gospel is not preached by the National " Clergy."

1813. John Collinson, M. A. of Queen's College. " A key " to the writings of the principal Fathers of the Chris-

" tian Church, who flourished during the first three cen-
" turies."

1814. William Van Mildert, D. D. Regius Professor of Divinity, and Canon of Christ Church. " An inquiry " into the general principles of Scripture-interpretation."

1815. Reginald Heber, M. A. late Fellow of All Souls' College. " The personality and office of the Christian Com-
" forter asserted and explained."

1816. John Hume Spry, M. A. of Oriel College. " Christian " Unity doctrinally and historically considered."

1817. John Miller, M. A. Fellow of Worcester College. "The " divine authority of holy Scripture asserted from its " adaptation to the real state of human nature."

1818. C. A. Moysey, D. D. late Student of Christ Church. " The Doctrines of Unitarians examined, as opposed to " the Church of England."

1819. Hector Davies Morgan, M. A. of Trinity College. " A " compressed view of the religious principles and prac-
" tices of the age; or, a trial of the chief spirits that are " in the world, by the standard of the Scriptures."

1820. Godfrey Fausset, M. A. late Fellow of Magdalen College. " The claims of the Established Church to exclusive " attachment and support, and the dangers which menace " her from schism and indifference."

1821. John Jones, M. A. of Jesus College. " The moral " tendency of divine revelation asserted and illustrated."

1822. Richard Whately, M. A. Fellow of Oriel College.

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1823. CHARLES GODDARD, D. D. Archdeacon of Lincoln.
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1824. J. J. CONYBEARE, M. A. late Student of Ch. Ch. "An
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"of the secondary and spiritual interpretation of Scrip-
"ture."

1825. GEORGE CHANDLER, LL. D. late Fellow of New Col-
lege. "The scheme of divine revelation considered,
"principally in its connection with the progress and im-
"provement of human society."

PREFACE.

IN a preface, a writer may be permitted to make a few explanatory statements respecting himself and his work, without incurring the charge of unwarrantable egotism.

With respect to the principle attempted to be established in the ensuing Lectures, I have nothing to say in this place. If the principle itself be faulty, or if I have failed properly to develope and illustrate it in the body of the work, nothing that can be offered in a preface will supply the defect. On its own merits therefore the work must stand or fall.

With respect to the mode of treating the subject, a few observations may not be superfluous. When I undertook this Lecture, and had selected my subject, I was desirous, in the first instance, to form my own opinions without any immediate reference to

other books, and with merely such a stock of information as my previous reading had given me. Accordingly, these discourses were not only sketched, but were written to the end, (except in a few matters of detail,) before I consulted any writer who had directed his attention to the same subjects. I afterwards examined what others had said on the matter, and then proceeded to expand, retrench, or correct the opinions which I had formed, or the statements which I had made.

This mode of proceeding has its advantages and its disadvantages. On the one side, it enables the writer to pursue his own course of thought without interruption or restraint; and, where he shall be found to accord in his views with other writers, it affords some satisfaction to perceive, that the same process of inquiry has produced a coincidence of opinion between persons, who had no concert or communication with each other.

On the other hand, the writer, when he comes to check his own speculations by a reference to others, has often the mortification to perceive that he must abandon his most favourite opinions; or, where his confidence remains unshaken, to discover that he has long ago been anticipated in observations, which he fondly imagined were exclusively his own.

I have thought it fair to make this statement, for reasons that must be sufficiently obvious. But there are two works, respecting which I would wish to give a more particular explanation. These are Taylor's Scheme of Scripture Divinity, formed upon the plan of the divine dispensations; and Edwards's History of Redemption. With these works I was unacquainted so much as by name, until I had nearly finished the first draft of these Lectures, and even then I abstained from looking at them till the last discourse was written. I mention this circumstance, because the main principle

and several of the details of these Lectures are so often coincident with the subject-matter of those works, that, without this explanation, I might be supposed to have borrowed from them not inconsiderably. I afterwards consulted those works, and have made a point of noting the few opinions or facts, for which I am indebted to them.

I am perfectly aware that no considerations can be expected to induce the public to extend its indulgence to a work, whose design or whose execution is defective. But, if an indulgent judgment may be claimed for any work, it is for one, which, like the present, was at first undertaken not altogether spontaneously, which has been composed amid the pressure of other occupations, and of which the terms of the undertaking forbid delay in the publication.

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—Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

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The Christian world has advanced in virtue, as well as in religious knowledge. We must judge from the past achievements of reason what it would have accomplished, if still left to itself. Christianity improves many who reject it; also charged with much evil, of which it is innocent. Probably the sole cause that idolatry is not still the religion of the civilized world. Evils of idolatry, negative and positive. Beneficial influence of Christianity on international policy;—on national policy;—on woman and conjugal relation;—on parental relation;—on masters and servants;—gladiators;—on rich and poor. Wide and beneficial effect of the Christian principle of charity. Abstract model of perfection, as we may suppose it formed in the Epicurean, in the Stoic, in the Christian schools. Many Christians have made high attainments in moral excellence. P. 233.

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2 PETER iii. 13.

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LECTURE I

PSALM xxxiii. 11.

The counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever: and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.

THE general language of scripture not only declares that God is the Creator of the visible universe, and that his creation is the work of consummate wisdom; but it moreover teaches us, that, from the beginning, he has imposed upon the works of his hands a fixed destination, and has arranged them in all their parts with a view to their accomplishing certain foreseen purposes;—a law, which they have fulfilled, and still continue to fulfil, without deviation, without interruption, and without cessation. And this truth, which may be asserted respecting the works of the material creation, is no less indisputable with regard to the system of the moral world. The laws by which man has been governed, and the

course by which human affairs have been regulated, have been disposed, and have tended with unerring certainty, to promote particular ends, particular results, contemplated by the divine Mind from the earliest period from which we can compute the course of time. Nor is this truth the less sure, because the limited faculties of man may not always, or, more properly, may but seldom, be able to trace, throughout their whole course, the designs of Him, to whom *a thousand years are but as one day*[a], and to whom *the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance*[b].

Still, to endeavour to raise ourselves to contemplations of this nature, and to trace through a long course of ages the plans of divine wisdom, is one of the noblest efforts of which the human mind is capable. The power, even in a limited degree, of taking such views is in fact one of the points, in which we may be said still to retain the nearest likeness to our Maker. As God can

[a] 2 Pet. iii. 8. [b] Isaiah xl. 15.

with one comprehensive glance survey the past, the present, and the future; so of our species it has been beautifully and appropriately said, that we have been made "with "large discourse, looking before and after." And, as this description is applicable to man alone, compared with animals of inferior rank in the scale of creation, so, in comparison with himself in different conditions, it is a characteristic mark of the adult as distinguished from the infant individual, of the species in a state of intellectual improvement, from the same species rude and barbarous. We know the extremely limited range of the views of childhood; and, in tracing the progress of the human mind from the ruder to the more cultivated stages of society, we may perceive, in the first stage, something very similar to the condition of the child, who is exclusively occupied with present objects; and, in the second, to that of the man, who can reflect upon the past and speculate upon the future.

The capacity of taking such views is also, like the experience purchased by extended life, one of the most important advantages

gained by those, whose lot is cast in the more mature age of the world. We may observe a certain defect in the genius and general character of the most eminent historians of earlier times, in comparison with those of later date. In the finest specimens of history even of the classic ages, the style is indeed beautiful in composition, vivid in description, and abounding, unquestionably, with detached remarks of profound wisdom; in short, like their poetry, fresh, vigorous, animated, and striking. But they abound with crude speculations. They are less furnished with the materials for a large induction: they theorize on insufficient and unsubstantial data. The power of taking general views, of tracing events through a long range of time from their causes to their final results, and of resolving facts into principles,—this is more the praise of those, to whom the circumstances of their age and country have given a wider range of vision. And even if we suppose this merit to be the result, less of superiority of intellect, than of the vantage ground on which modern historians stand, still it renders

their labours more instructive, as they are more comprehensive in their views, and more philosophical in their deductions.

As the capacity of taking large views is a characteristic of our species,—of our species in its most intellectual and matured state;—so the views themselves are highly profitable for our moral improvement. Such at least I hope they may be made to appear,—since it is the design of these Lectures to trace at large one great scheme of divine providence; and I am deeply sensible that the most luminous and profound disquisition, unless it be conducive to practical edification, is but *as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal*[c].

1. We may then observe, in the first place, that such views serve to exalt our conceptions of the wisdom and power of God. When we turn our thoughts to a Being who formed an original design for the benefit of man, and who, for a period of nearly six thousand years, has pursued that plan without intermission, adapting it to all the

[c] 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

changes in human society, and bending the most important events to second and promote it; when, I say, we turn our thoughts to this object, we cannot but be struck with amazement at Him, whose wisdom could devise, and whose power could execute so vast a scheme. And although it may be in some respects improper to mete a power that is in fact immeasurable, even by the highest standard that we can imagine, yet, as we can only approach to any idea of eternity by continually adding together a succession of the longest periods known to our computation, so we can best conceive the idea of infinite wisdom and power by imagining the highest exercise of either, of which man would be capable, and then, by seeing how vastly it has been transcended by the works of the Almighty. Such considerations, as they tend to give us adequate conceptions respecting the wisdom and power of God, are in themselves most valuable; and from such considerations we farther proceed, by a regular corollary, to the propriety of paying those acts of adoration, worship, praise, honour,

and obedience, which are due to a Being invested with such attributes.

2. In the next place, such views have the effect of exciting our minds to lofty contemplations. Our habitual tendency is to grovel on the earth, and to be engrossed with present and with petty objects. But, by looking to subjects large in their dimensions and important in their influence, in particular by looking to subjects so large, so important, as the plans of almighty wisdom, we nurse and invigorate the faculty of generalization, which is the peculiar privilege and boast of our nature, and which cannot be strengthened without strengthening all that is most excellent and most divine within us. In regard also to the immediate object proposed for our contemplation, we learn to view it in its outline and in its general features; and by such a view avoid many of the details, which principally give rise to difference of opinion, and, thence, to all the irritation and animosity, which peculiarly result from contradiction about trifles.

3. Again, Nothing can so strengthen and

confirm our faith, our confidence in final results, as a view of the unerring course in which events have hitherto proceeded under the control of divine wisdom and power. When we consult the times of old, and find that God has been able steadily to pursue his plans through all the revolutions of the past, we are convinced that they will equally proceed amid all the changes and chances of the future. And thence, whatever may be the aspect of things at the time, however they may lower and threaten to disappoint and confound us, we still look onwards with firm assurance, that He who has begun, and has hitherto executed his work, will be able to bring it to a complete and successful issue in the end.

4. And with respect to *what* will be more immediately the subject of these Lectures, with respect to a point which brings it directly within the scope and design of the pious Founder, it tends to prove that our holy religion cannot be a matter of chance or of human contrivance, when we find that it has been in constant and progressive operation from the commencement of time to

the present period, and, throughout its whole course, has been intimately connected with the leading and most important events of the history of the world.

If there be any truth in these remarks respecting the importance and beneficial effects of directing the mind to large and comprehensive views of divine providence; if such views afford the noblest exercise of our faculties; if they be useful toward establishing the truth of revelation, and even instrumental toward promoting the great cardinal graces which our religion especially recommends, toward confirming our faith, elevating our hope, and kindling our charity, I would solicit your favourable attention to the subject proposed to be treated in these Lectures, viz. the developement and progress of the scheme of divine revelation from the beginning of things to the present time.

Of all the subjects that can be proposed for our consideration, this is the most important; and one might venture to illustrate its importance, by comparing it with another subject, immensely, it must be con-

fessed, disproportionate. But, as, in a picture, we introduce a figure of smaller, but known, dimensions, to give some idea of the height or magnitude of a larger object, which we can less accurately measure; so, if, having taken a subject the most pregnant with human interest, and placing it by the side of the plan of redemption, we find the former shrink by comparison into insignificance, this circumstance may serve to give us the best and the grandest conception of the importance of that plan of divine providence, which we would attempt to illustrate.

Of surveys that relate to affairs merely civil or political, the most interesting and the most instructive is, perhaps, the history of the Roman state from its commencement to its termination; combining, as that history does, a greater number of points that deservedly claim our attention, than can be found elsewhere. It proceeds, with a remarkable degree of unity of action, through a period of time, which bears no inconsiderable proportion to the past duration of our world. In that long period of time, the

causes which affect the destiny of nations were able to have their full play, and to produce their appropriate effects, independent of the casual and sometimes disturbing influence of individual characters or of adventitious circumstances. The subject is also interesting from its magnitude, as it is connected with the fortunes and happiness of a large portion of the nations of the globe. We moreover possess documents, more or less complete, which enable us to take the survey in question with tolerable accuracy; and lastly, we are now removed from the object in view to a sufficient distance, to be able to survey it, not in parts, but in the whole, and with attention not disproportionably attracted by circumstances and points that touch ourselves.

Accordingly, if there be one subject of a merely secular nature, that particularly demands and repays our attention, it is the Roman history. In the course of that history we see a diminutive state rising by regular steps to a condition of unexampled power; and again, sinking from that eminence into the lowest degradation. We are

enabled to observe what may be effected, in the first instance, by institutions that look exclusively to the formation of the public character, and to the production of those bold, vigorous, and energetic qualities, which must ever give the state wherein they abound an irresistible ascendency over its tamer neighbours or rivals. We are enabled to see how, when these qualities had produced their appropriate effects of wealth and aggrandizement, the temptation to wield and enjoy such power generated a description of men, who availed themselves of the opportunities afforded by such a system to embroil the government at home, till civil commotions arose, and ultimately subsided in the triumph of one, first over his political opponents, and then over his country. We are also enabled to see how, beneath the overshadowing despotism thus produced, public virtues immediately drooped and faded; every thing that is generous and noble lay prostrate; and if the power itself continued to stand, it stood, not by its roots firmly grappling the soil, but only by its own weight, ready to fall as soon as there

should be found any external force of sufficient momentum to impel and overthrow it.

Such are some of the views which have been repeatedly drawn from a survey of the Roman history; and which, as they exhibit some grand principles that, under similar circumstances, will probably ever act in a manner nearly similar, are replete with instruction, and are capable of teaching the best rules of moral and political wisdom.

But, although such be the importance and interest of the history in question, we shall find it absolutely insignificant, when compared with the immense value of the history of human salvation. In point of duration, the latter commences from the beginning of this system of things, and not only will endure to the end of this system, but will continue its effects through the endless ages of eternity. The parties concerned are the whole human race; and concerned deeply and vitally, since it involves their happiness both now and hereafter. The lessons which it teaches, on the

one side, respecting the wisdom and mercy of God, and on the other, respecting the tremendous consequences of sin in man, are most impressive. The documents which we possess on the subject are of the surest authority, since they bear the seal of divine inspiration. And there prevails throughout that harmony and continuity of plan, which may be expected where it is under the management of One, whose power nothing can defeat, nothing interrupt.

Such appears to be the magnitude and importance of the subject proposed to be treated in the ensuing Lectures. But the subject having yet been stated only in a general manner, I would now proceed to explain more particularly the precise point of view, under which I conceive the great plan of divine revelation may not unprofitably be submitted to observation.

The whole scheme takes its rise from the fall and defection of man. This is the hinge on which every thing turns. Had man continued upright and obedient, there would have been no necessity, in any sense of the word, to *restore* him. Persevering in

a state of sinless innocence, and exempt from evil moral or physical, he would have enjoyed an immortality of happiness; then, as now, from the unmerited grace and favour of God, but under circumstances and conditions entirely different. Still, as a moral agent, it was necessary that he should be subject to some probation; and, if in a state of probation, that he should be at liberty to observe or to transgress the test of obedience prescribed to him. We perhaps might also find, that, in the peculiar circumstances under which mankind had been placed, a single pair in the world, abounding with every thing, not only necessary, but convenient and agreeable for life, it is not easy to conceive in what other point, than in that actually prescribed, the test of obedience to the will of God could have been made to subsist. It may, however, be sufficient, and it is perhaps safer, to resolve the whole into the sovereign and unquestionable will of God. It must be unnecessary for me, as being a subject so well known, to state the particular trial imposed on man, or his lamentable failure. It is

enough to say, that by disobedience he lost the divine favour; and, with the knowledge of good and evil, learned by fatal experience the prevalence of the latter over beings, no longer strong in the immediate protection and grace of God. Having yielded himself servant to sin, he became by that act subject in his own person to the various evils that sin entails upon man, to various distresses in the progress through life, to disease and decay, and finally to death, with all its tremendous train of after-consequences. Nor was the stream, thus polluted at its source, likely to purify itself in the course of time. There was no prospect that future generations, to be born under the sentence, and under all the pains and disabilities incidental to the sentence, should be able by any efforts of their own to extricate themselves from those evils. On the other hand, that God should have immediately reversed his own decree; that he should have remitted the penal consequences of disobedience so lately and so solemnly denounced by his own mouth; this would not only have argued in the

Judge of the whole earth a mutability inconsistent with his character, but would have been little likely to command the respect and the submission of the subjects of his government. But God is infinite both in wisdom and in goodness. He was able at once to devise a scheme, by which *mercy and truth might meet together, righteousness and peace might kiss each other*[d]; by which, without inverting his laws, without compromising his dignity, without extenuating the heinousness of sin, he might yet undo the mischief occasioned by the transgression of our first parents, and might *restore* mankind to grace and favour. This was the incarnation and death of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son; who, at some future time to be determined by the divine counsels, was to offer himself in the human form a piacular victim for the offending race of man, and, satisfaction to divine justice being thus made, was to reestablish the communication between heaven and earth, and to raise fallen man to that capa-

[d] Psalm lxxxv. 10.

city of serving and pleasing God, which he enjoyed before his transgression.

The Atonement—the Atonement by the blood of Jesus Christ for the sins of man—has thus been from the beginning the corner stone of the whole structure of divine revelation. This is the leading clue that guides us through the whole scheme. This is the main point, to which every thing contained in that scheme looks directly or indirectly, prospectively or retrospectively. This is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and end, of what may be distinctively termed the great counsel of God.

But, while the Atonement has been the animating spirit that has pervaded and informed the whole system of revelation, the body and form, in which that spirit should be invested, might have been variously determined; and the execution of the whole plan, and of every part of that plan, no less than its original conception, has been altogether dependent on the good pleasure of God. With Him it was optional even whether this great salvation should in any

way be made known to man; since we can, in strictness, conceive it possible that a reconciliatory process might have gone on in such a manner, as to have remained secret to the whole race of mankind in this life[c], as, in point of fact, the real atonement has remained secret to a very large majority of mankind, to whom we believe, nevertheless, its benefits to have accrued. Or, if the gracious design of God were to be made known to man, it might have been made known by modes and processes, and under circumstances, infinitely various. For instance, the Redeemer might have been sent into the world immediately after the fall, or at a period less or more distant from that event. The act, by which he accomplished the redemption, might have stood single and insulated, or might have been connected with a series of preparatory and introductory measures. And if the plan were progressive, each succeeding measure might have looked exclusively to its peculiar and ultimate and supreme object, or

[c] Paley's Evidences, vol. ii. p. 24.

might have been made a vehicle for conveying communications from God on other matters, which he proposed to reveal to man.

These, and numberless other possible combinations, were all, as we must be well aware, in the breast of God alone. But, looking to what is now known to be the state of the case, we perceive that the advent of the Redeemer was postponed, comparatively, to a late period of the world. We believe, indeed, that the meritorious efficacy of the redemption commenced from the period when it was decreed in the divine counsels, and that, in the eyes of an eternal and all-seeing God, the *Lamb was slain*, slain virtually and in effect, *from the foundation of the world*[f]. But according to the estimate of shortlived mortals, the promised Seed did not proceed to bruise the head of the serpent, till the hopes of the faithful had been put to a long and a severe trial. So, looking again to the actual state of the case, we know that his personal

[f] Rev. xiii. 8.

appearance was preceded by earlier dispensations of religion, each introductory to the following, and each, at the same time, contrived to be made instrumental for promulgating other and most important information respecting the nature and the will of God.

This arrangement of divine providence is so remarkable, that it cannot fail to attract our observation; nor only to attract our observation, but also to excite in us a curiosity to understand, and a desire to interpret it. And, if that curiosity and that desire be kept within just bounds; if any inquiry for the purpose of gratifying them be prosecuted soberly, and with a proper feeling of submission to the supreme will of God; the feeling cannot in any way be thought reprehensible.

To me then it appears,—though I speak with an overwhelming sense of the insufficiency, of the nothingness of our best reason in attempting to fathom the depths of divine wisdom;—to me it appears, that in order to qualify us to be partakers, individually, of the future, the spiritual, the eter-

nal benefits of the redemption by Christ, with a view and in subserviency to this design, the Almighty has also formed a plan, whereby man, taken collectively and in the aggregate, might become gradually wiser and better in this life; might be trained during his abode on earth in such a course of improvement as his nature is capable of receiving; and might be made to approximate, in such degree as he is able, to that *restoration* to a similitude to his Maker, which it is the purpose of divine providence ultimately to complete.

In pursuance of this great design, it should seem that man has been placed by the Almighty under a course of moral discipline and instruction in his passage through successive generations; that many providential arrangements have been made to conduct him in his destined path of improvement; and that, as the chief and most efficacious of those arrangements, he has been placed, as it were, under the tuition of revealed religion, to be instructed in the knowledge of divine things. Accordingly, it should seem that revelation, in its ca-

pacity of the preceptor of man, has ever shaped its proceedings with a view to his edification. With this view, it has appended to its several dispensations much matter, if not strictly and essentially necessary to the direct purposes of that dispensation, yet *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* With the same view, it has thrown a considerable light on the divine nature and attributes, and has given many precepts and admonitions for the regulation of human life.

That the course of discipline, to which the human race has been thus subjected, has been, to a certain and to a considerable degree, successful, we can hardly, I think, fail to perceive, if we will compare man with himself at two eras far removed from each other. Nearer periods of time, as they are subject to various alternations of advancement and recession, are less calculated to shew the point in question. But if we will take two distant terms, if we will consider the state of mankind, for instance, 3000 years ago and at the present day, we must

be struck with the progress that has been made. The observation of the past may even incline us to look onwards, and may tempt us to believe, not certainly that man, while he remains on earth, shall ever be exempt from sin and misery, but that, when the plans of divine wisdom shall have had a fuller operation, he may yet be advanced and meliorated to a degree, which it requires perhaps a sanguine, but not, I hope, an irrational or an unchristian frame of mind to anticipate. But, without insisting on such speculations for the future, with a view solely to what has actually taken place, we may next remark, that, if revealed religion, so far as it has borne a part in the training and discipline of man, has executed its office with any degree of success, it is because it has proceeded on such principles, as alone can make any plan of education successful.

Our experience and observation tell us, that all education should be conducted on these two principles; the one, to adapt the nature and extent of the instruction, and also the mode of conveying it, to the facul-

ties and capacity of the pupil; the other, to consider each step in knowledge, not merely as an advance to that particular point, but as an accommodation and facility for a farther progression.

So it has been in the education of the human species under revelation. According to the first principle, the course of discipline, adapting itself to that intellectual childhood which characterized the early state of man, was at first addressed to the senses; it was also elementary, confined to the rudiments of divine knowledge, content with giving milk to the child. But neither, according to the second principle, has any dispensation of religion terminated in itself. Each has been used as a stage, whereon to erect something higher. Or, to pursue the illustrations before adopted from the apostle, the simpler elements have led the way to the deeper things of God. The aliment, that has been given, has not only been such as could be digested and assimilated into the human system, but also such as would tend to strengthen and mature it, till it

could bear, not milk for the child, but meat for the man [g].

These views, if they be correct, are elucidatory of those arrangements of divine providence in the matter of revelation, to which we have before adverted, and afford some explanation why the dispensations of religion have been dealt out to man in the mode and in the measure which we see. And these are the views which I propose more particularly to illustrate in the ensuing Lectures. I would state, and I would willingly state in such manner as to make it impossible that my meaning should be misconceived, that revelation has principally looked to spiritual matters, and that its main design has been to make known the great doctrine of immortal life, purchased for man by the sacrifice of the divine Redeemer. But I also believe, and I would attempt to shew, that, in order to qualify us to be meet partakers of that great salvation, revelation has, moreover, been given

[g] 1 Cor. iii. 2. Heb. v. 12, 13, 14.

with a view to promote the progressive improvement of man in this life; and, with this view, has been adapted to the circumstances and condition of the human race, in the successive periods of the world.

This view of things will lead us to consider the scheme of divine revelation principally in its connection with the progress of human society. It will also lead us to treat the subject, in a great measure, historically; to trace the annals of revelation and the annals of general history, both of course merely in their outline, but in their mutual relation and dependency. And, without farther anticipating what will follow, I think it will appear, that, as the two systems have both been under the presiding care of the same divine providence, so they have exercised, and have been designed to exercise, a reciprocal influence each over the other; that, on the one side, revelation has often received its shape and direction from the course of secular events; on the other side, the course of secular events has often been moulded with a view to promote the interests and to effectuate the purposes of revelation.

But, before we proceed to trace what I thus suppose to constitute one great scheme of Providence, it should be observed, that we must not expect to see it advancing with an uniform, or always a perceptible pace. We may imagine plans, in which, as in a drama constructed on the strict rules of art, there shall be a regularly progressive series of action, and a symmetrical adjustment of part to part. In the mean while, the mighty Master of the universe, as he has the command of all time in his hands, may conduct his plans with a seeming irregularity, that mocks our petty calculations. In fact, analogy, so far as analogy deserves our attention, might lead us to expect, that, in so large a plan, there should be spaces apparently blank and void. The large portion of our globe occupied by waters, mountains, and deserts, that are incapable of being rendered habitable or productive for the use of man; the hours of every day necessarily spent in a suspension of consciousness, or in the mere sustenance and recreation of our earthly part; the years passed in the destitution and feebleness of infancy, or in a

course of discipline and instruction preparatory to the great purposes of human life; and, of mankind, the numbers inevitably condemned to ignorance, by inhabiting countries overspread with barbarism, or by being employed, in more cultivated regions, in the laborious and coarse occupations of society; these things, in conjunction with the irregular and seemingly desultory manner in which the moral government of the universe is administered, seem to form points of analogy, which might lead us to expect, that the plan of the Almighty in the matter of revelation should not be conducted with that nice and exact precision, which we can imagine, and perhaps might desire. But, as the foregoing appearances, however remarkable, do not lead us to question the power, or the wisdom, or the goodness of Providence, so neither should the slowness or irregularity of the plan of revelation make us feel any misgivings as to its existence or its ultimate success. It is enough for us, if, having perceived one great design, we can satisfy ourselves, by infallible indexes and admeasurements, that it has hitherto advanced pro-

gressively, if not uninterruptedly nor speedily; enough, if, from the observation of the past, we can rest assured that, with whatever fluctuations, with whatever occasional ebbs, it will still roll onwards, still pursue its career, in *which it will neither labour, nor be weary, nor cease from its work.* And if my proposed undertaking shall have any claims to your favourable attention, it cannot be by making any new discoveries in this great system, but by tracing it in continuity, and in one uninterrupted series. I have no pretension to bring forward what has been before unsaid. My only aim is to pursue the thread, which, from the beginning of time to the present day, seems to run through the great maze of the providential history of man; to bring together parts, each of which has been severally examined and demonstrated, and to combine them in such a manner, as to make them appear to be, what in reality they are, one grand, one consistent and harmonious whole.

The subject will carry us over a vast duration of time and an immense field of events. In the execution of a plan of such

magnitude, it will of course be impracticable, within the limited compass of these Lectures, to enter into many details. But these details may safely be curtailed, since they are fully given in numberless works of standard merit. The subject itself will, I think, be best exhibited, if we consider, first, the primeval dispensation; next, the religious system given to the chosen family and people; and then, some of the effects of those revelations on the gentile world. We shall afterwards consider, successively, the personal ministry of Jesus Christ; the progress of his visible church on earth; the influence which the spirit of his religion has thus far produced on society; and, lastly, the chief causes which have hitherto impeded its operation, and our reasonable hopes and expectations for the time to come.

This plan, were it but adequately executed, would exhibit before our eyes the great scheme of divine providence in the matter of revelation, as we examine a large tract of country represented on a model.

Or, we may say, it would place us in such a situation for the survey of the whole plan, as if, from some commanding eminence, we could see at once submitted to our eye the course of a mighty and majestic river, from its source to its termination. We might see it rising in the midst of rocks and precipices, far from the haunts of men; thence we might see it augmented by tributary streams, and visiting regions, sometimes barren and desert, but more frequently smiling under cultivation and improvement; and ever, as it proceeded on its course, contributing to the accommodation and enjoyment of the realms through which it flowed. So we might see the stream of divine revelation originating where society was uncultivated; we might next observe it with augmented volume traversing the vast and diversified field of history, and observe it ever diffusing happiness and blessings on those whom it visited. And, should we be stationed, as our great poet has stationed the parent of mankind, on "the specular mount" of prophecy, we

might even trace the same stream, when it would have been hid from our unassisted vision, and might follow its onward course, till it was lost in the immeasurable, the shoreless ocean of eternity.

LECTURE II.

JOHN xvi. 12.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

THESE words, addressed by our blessed Saviour to his disciples during his abode on earth, may form no unapt introduction to an attempt to illustrate the manner, in which the same gracious Word, He, who, in all the revelations of the divine will, has been the organ of communication with man, has, in the several periods of the world, adapted his religious instructions to the exigencies and to the capacity of those who were to receive them.

In the introductory Lecture, I supposed that, in subordination to the great plan of redemption by the meritorious sacrifice of the promised Seed, it has been the design of Almighty God to lead the human race through a course of progressive improvement in this world. For this purpose, I supposed that divine revelation has been

assigned to be the instructor of man in religious knowledge; and that its several dispensations have been given in accordance with the actual circumstances of the world in its successive stages. In illustration of this view of things it is our business in the present Lecture to trace the condition of man, and, in close conjunction with that question, the course of religious instruction imparted to him, in the earliest stage of our present system.

On this subject, it may, however, be fairly acknowledged, that the scantiness and obscurity of our authentic materials make it no easy matter to speak. What we know with assurance, I need hardly remark, is drawn altogether from the Bible; and, in the Bible, the information respecting a period of time, extending over more than 2000 years, is comprised in eleven short chapters. Some writers have indeed indulged themselves in giving us details of the empires that were formed, and of the kings that reigned, before the flood [a]. But such ac-

[a] Univ. Hist. Anc. vol. i. p. 44, &c.

counts, if not altogether fabulous, rest on authority extremely questionable. In the ensuing inquiry I would confine myself strictly to what is written, or what may be collected by fair inference from scripture. And if we will now look to the scriptural account of the first, of the aboriginal, condition of man, I think we shall perceive a proof of the high value of our Bible, (independent of its other and superior claims to our regard,) as containing materials for a history of the human species, which a close examination will shew to be the most credible and the most consonant with sound philosophy.

We know that certain writers [b] have chosen to describe the primordial representatives of the human species, in language that might be applied to the beasts that perish, as engaged solely in providing for their physical necessities, without any fixed habitation, without any knowledge of the arts, without language, without social union, and without religion. So brutally debased, in-

[b] Lucretius, lib. v. Hor. Sat. iii. 99. Cic. Tusc. v.

deed, we believe man never has been found. And it immediately strikes us that the scriptural representation of primeval man differs essentially from such a picture. It even exhibits him in a state widely different from our authentic accounts of several barbarous and, as we suppose, degenerate tribes, on their first discovery by more civilized nations, both in ancient and in modern times.

The scripture tells us, that the human race sprang from a single pair. It also tells us, what we should not otherwise have known, that the first authors of the human race rendered themselves obnoxious to the displeasure of God. Still we find man, immediately after his expulsion from paradise, not subsisting on the nuts and berries of the wood, nor even on the precarious supply of the chase; but, according to his doom, a cultivator of the earth [c], with some knowledge of the plants useful for human consumption, and with domestic animals under his control. We find a provision early made for his clothing [d]. We find him at

[c] Genesis iv. 2. [d] Chap. iii. 1.

once fixed to a determinate spot for his habitation; and we early read of a collection of residences, which, although of necessity extremely small, exhibits the principle of social union [e]. We also find him, though at a period somewhat later than that of which I now speak, master of certain arts calculated for the convenience and even the embellishment of human life, as the working of metals, and music [f].

In his domestic capacity we find the law, which had originally provided an help meet for man, continuing to subsist in the institution of marriage [g]; and although in one, and that an apostate race, we perceive afterwards an instance of polygamy, there is nothing that shews the slightest tendency toward the vague intercourse of the sexes, of which we read in the accounts of some of the South sea islands, or of the community of wives, which is said once to have prevailed in our own country [h]. From the matrimonial union the distinction of families necessarily

[e] Gen. iii. 16. [f] Chap. iii. 22, 23. [g] Chap. iii. 23.
[h] Cæsar, l. v. s. 10.

followed; and, by this distinction, the foundation was at once laid for those domestic sympathies and charities, which form the first step toward the moral exaltation of man, as they first carry his thoughts beyond the range of mere selfish gratification.

To this establishment of the domestic ties, it appears that we should add the recognition of property. Those who tilled the ground or tended cattle, and, still more, those who, in later times, fabricated tents or wrought in brass and iron, must have done it for their own use, and with a sense of exclusive right over the products of their industry and ingenuity.

To proceed also to a point more connected with the intellectual nature of man, we find him from the beginning possessed of language; and he, who, immediately after his creation, was enabled to give *names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field*[i], was also able at once to hold communion with God and

[i] Genesis ii. 20.

with the partner of his life by articulate speech.

All these circumstances imply that extreme rudeness and savage ignorance are far from the original and proper condition of man; that art, as has been excellently said, is his nature[k]; and that so far from its being the law of his existence to emerge into order and civilization out of a state little above the beasts of the field, we have reason to believe, that when he is found in such barbarism, it is the consequence of a degeneracy and deterioration of his faculties, and of a loss of the endowments once possessed by the primitive race.

I call them *endowments*, since in all this we can hardly fail to perceive the hand of God placing man at once in the path of order and cultivation. In tracing the stream of knowledge backwards to its origin, it is difficult to discover from whence it first sprang, except from the supernal source of all wisdom and mercy. We are speaking of a period when all collateral as-

[k] Burke, vol. vi. p. 218.

sistance or instruction from fellow-mortals in a state of farther advancement was out of the question. And, had primeval man been thrown entirely on his own resources; had he been left to extricate himself as he could, from a state of utter ignorance and destitution; had he been cast on a world, where all that gives comfort and dignity to human life was to be fashioned by himself from the rough and shapeless material, all to be created by his own skill from a chaos without form and void; it is probable his posterity would have been consigned to hopeless and insuperable barbarism. It is at least certain they must have struggled with ignorance and wretchedness for a period longer than is consistent with the duration of the world, as it may be calculated from authorities independent of the Bible; and, still more, than can be made to accord with the scriptural narrative. It is, indeed, remarkable, that the traditions of all nations speak of the primary arts, as having been communicated to man by some considerate and propitious deity. And, without supposing, with certain mystics, that all

science and philosophy were possessed by the parent of mankind, it does not seem unreasonable to believe, that he was directly instructed by his Maker in matters that were esential to his immediate comfort and almost necessary to his existence. With respect to language, it is indeed generally allowed that no human powers could have invented it by original excogitation[1]. That God first clothed man we know by positive information; and, by parity of reason, it seems fair to suppose that He, who provided a defence for the bodily frame from the inclemencies of the seasons, would also direct the first race to the choice of those habits of life and those modes of subsistence, which would be conducive to their immediate welfare and to their subsequent improvement. All this may be admitted, without supposing that the instruction imparted was more than quite elementary. All that was needed, was to give the first impulse and direction to the human mind; and, those being once

[1] Magee, vol. ii. n°. 53.

given, man might have been left to advance himself by the ordinary processes of observation and experience. Neither is it necessary to suppose that the early races pursued the career of improvement with great rapidity. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that society was for a long while, perhaps to a later period than is commonly supposed, very simple and inartificial. I have directed your views to the external circumstances, in which the primeval race appears to have been placed by the Almighty, only in order to shew how completely in consistency with that state of things were the proceedings of the same divine power in the great article of religion.

Of those proceedings the great principles seem to have been, that religion was essential to man; and that, on the one side, he was not likely to discover it for himself, yet, on the other side, was fully capable of receiving it, when imparted. Accordingly, it was revealed to him by his Creator; but though revealed, it was only in such manner and measure, as suited the circumstances of the case. In its manner, it was

plain and palpable, as accorded with the apprehensions of man not far advanced in knowledge; in its measure, it was clear and express on points of immediate necessity; less clear and less express, yet still sufficient to indicate the main purposes of the Almighty, on points that required the lapse of time to bring those purposes to maturity and perfection.

It cannot be necessary for me to occupy much of your time in asserting the essential importance of a knowledge of the fundamental articles of religion to the infant race of man. A knowledge of God and of our responsibility to Him, as the Creator, Ruler, and Judge of the universe, must at all times be the great principle to regulate and quell the disorderly passions of man. But the case must have been yet stronger in the infancy of the world, when various restraints, which in an advanced state of society act as subsidiaries, sometimes as substitutes to religion, were all wanting. Without religious knowledge, man would have been an overgrown infant, mature in

physical strength, endued with faculties of vast capacity, and passions of tremendous energy, yet destitute of the principle, and with him the sole principle, which by its controlling influence should direct those faculties and those passions to beneficial purposes. Nor is this all. The Almighty had formed the ulterior plan of the redemption. And it is clear this plan must have rested, as on its basis, on the great primary truths of all religion. *He that cometh to God*, says the apostle, *must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* [m]. In the same spirit we may say, he that cometh to Christ must be previously acquainted with the existence and the leading attributes of God.

But can we suppose that the early race would have acquired a knowledge of religion by the native strength of their own understanding? We are so familiar from our infant years with the thoughts of God, that we are apt to forget we owe those

[m] Heb. xi. 6.

thoughts to early communication [n]. We are apt to forget how difficult it would be *by searching to find out God.* Even if we should suppose it possible, (a point, which I should think more than doubtful,) by any effort of original, unassisted ratiocination to arrive at the idea of God, together with all the deep things connected with that idea, it must at least be clear that profound reflection, continued exercise and cultivation of the intellectual powers, the accumulated wisdom of succeeding inquirers, and full leisure to turn the thoughts to abstract speculations, would all be requisite for the task. But we can hardly suppose that the aboriginal race, had they been left entirely to themselves, would either have set about such an inquiry, or would have succeeded in it, had they made the attempt. It is probable, they would not have raised their thoughts from earth to heaven. Or, if their mind had taken that direction, they would neither have known from whence to begin their reasonings on divine things [o],

[n] Ellis's Inquiry in Scholar Armed, p. 114.
[o] Ellis, p. 135.

nor, having begun, would they have had sure and firm steps, whereon to proceed.

But although man was incapable of originating the idea of religion, still when it was once imparted, it so exactly filled up the vacant space in his mind, it so well supplied his wants, that seek to repose themselves in some superior power; it so well employed his faculties, that love to expatiate in the vast and the infinite; that it was immediately apprehended, and was never afterwards lost. It became indeed corrupted, dreadfully corrupted. But this very circumstance serves to shew in what degree religion is suitable and important to man; since he has clung to it, with all its mass of superadded error, he has endured all the corruptions that have attached themselves to it, rather than part with an idea, that has become an indefeasible and almost integral part of himself.

Accordingly the merciful Creator was not unmindful of the necessities of man. That knowledge, which it vitally concerned man to possess,—that, which he was little in a condition to have discovered for himself,—

yet which, when discovered, was so suitable and congenial to his mind, was at once communicated to him. And it was communicated both in the manner and in the degree, which, it appears, were the best adapted to his actual condition.

As to the manner; we have spoken of man, as placed at once by his Creator above a state of abject barbarism. Still we must suppose that for a long while his modes of life, as they were extremely simple, were ill calculated to produce that cultivation of mind, which is requisite for the comprehension of abstract reasonings. Accordingly, the knowledge of divine things was communicated, not by metaphysical arguments, not by subtle disquisitions on the nature and attributes of God, processes which our own experience tells us are in the least possible degree suited to convey information on any subject to the immature mind, but demonstratively and palpably. In accommodation to the state of man, the Almighty condescended to become perceptible to his senses: he conversed with him; he issued his commands

and he administered his laws personally; and mingled himself by direct interposition in the course of human affairs.

The amount of religious knowledge, thus conveyed to the earliest race, as we may collect it from scripture, must have proceeded at least thus far. That God existed, the foundation stone of all religion, they could not doubt, because they saw and conversed with him. They were taught also to know him in the unity of his substance, as the sole author of the universe, and the sole power that continued to sustain and rule it. His wisdom, his justice tempered with mercy, his purity, his abhorrence of sin; all this was sensibly and strikingly demonstrated to their observation by the earliest transactions on record. We may add, that the survivance of the human soul after death, and a future state of reward and punishment, if they were not communicated by more direct information, were involved in the great promise of the redemption, to which we shall presently advert. We perceive also the connection between religion and morality at once esta-

blished; and not only the moral duties enjoined, but the violation of those duties placed on the just footing of offences against God [p]. Man was also taught the duty of praying to his heavenly Father, and of worshipping him with peculiar rites; and, when sin was entered into the world, he was taught to entertain a hope,—a hope grounded on no unauthorized assumption,—of pardon for transgression, on compliance with certain prescribed terms.

I would not assert that these great points of religion were communicated to the primeval race with any systematic precision; or that they were seen in that clear and steady light which was afterwards shed over them. It remained for later times, aided by farther assistance from Heaven, and capable of more profound reflection, to perceive the divine attributes in all their perfection and immensity. A longer practice and experience of life also were requisite to give a full explication to the moral duties. And, still more, all the points, connected

[p] Gen. iv. 10.

with the great question of the Redemption, required a farther and clearer illustration from Heaven.

But, although some indistinctness may have hung over these matters, still the fact remains, that these great articles of faith were possessed by the first generation of created man[q]. We perceive a creed, to which all the ingenuity of all the learned and pious of after-times has not been able to add a new article of genuine religion; and this creed we perceive at a time, when, if the Bible did not tell us from whence it came, few would be disposed to assert it could have been devised by human wit unaided by superior instruction. Surely then we *imagine a vain thing*, when we speak of natural religion, in the sense of that religion, which man has discovered for himself by his own native, unassisted powers. The question is not one of speculation or of antecedent probability, but, to those who admit the authority of the Bible, of historical fact. In consideration of human want, in

[q] Ellis, p. 139.

pity to human infirmity, religion was in the beginning communicated to the original progenitors of mankind, and from them derived to their posterity, and seldom derived in its primitive purity. The foundation, on which all the structure of future revelation was to be built, was at once laid. In the subsequent dispensations we shall find that these fundamental articles of all religion, as they became generally recognised, and each of them in proportion to its general recognition, became less the subject of especial instruction. On the other hand, in the peculiar matter of the Redemption, a different course is pursued. On this subject the divine communications become more full and precise, as time advances. The light from heaven proceeds from a feeble glimmer to a clear blaze of illumination. But, in either case, we may trace the same almighty wisdom, shaping its course with a view to the circumstances of those with whom it had to deal, and, at the same time, fixing its regard with undeviating steadiness on the great and ultimate object, to which it tended.

In the foregoing detail, I have felt myself compelled, if not with strict propriety, yet I hope not inexcusably, to consider in continuity and connection some points of religious knowledge, which man acquired before and after the fall. Much, I am aware, was learned, when he was the innocent and happy inhabitant of the garden of Eden. But I have been willing to avoid so singular a course, as to speak, systematically, of a paradisaical dispensation. And, as I suppose the information communicated in paradise was continued, renewed, and illustrated to man, after the fall;—as, in fact, that continuation, renewal, and illustration were more than ever needed, when he had clouded and darkened his mind by sin;—I trust it may not be thought very improper, if I have blended together (what in fact the insufficiency of our information makes it difficult to separate) the religious knowledge acquired by man in his two different states.

But it is now more than time that we proceed to consider the revelations, for which the transgression of man created

especially the occasion, the revelations respecting the matter of the redemption.

As it was the design of the Almighty to reverse the effect of human transgression by some interposition of mercy, and as this design was, at the same time, utterly beyond the competency of man to discover, it appears reasonable that it should have been revealed to him, and, like the other great truths of religion, revealed in such measure and in such manner, as the circumstances of the case required. Of this intended interposition a particular and distinct disclosure might not have been suitable. It might have lessened the sorrow and compunction of our first parents for the act of disobedience of which they had been guilty; and, by raising in them a conceit of versatility in the counsels of God, might have weakened their fear of again offending him. A new probation, the probation of faith, was about to be imposed on them; and this trial might have lost some of its force, if all the circumstances of the future deliverance had been made too distinctly visible. Nor is it to be supposed that the intellectual

faculties of man were yet sufficiently advanced to comprehend all the deep and important truths, involved in the destined mode and process of the redemption.

But, although it might be proper to cast considerable obscurity over the future redemption, still we can also see reasons for its partial disclosure. Though man was fallen, and had offended God, it was not the design of his merciful Judge to drive him to despair. In this, as in every subsequent age, prophecy was intended to act its appropriate part of animating hope, and of directing the eye of faith toward some future good. And in the present instance, that intention was promoted by the well known prediction, which has been well termed the great charter of God's mercy to man[r], the prediction respecting the seed of the woman. The time, the circumstances, the author, and the organ of that prophetic declaration, all conspire to prove that it was intended to be understood, and in fact must have been understood, in a sense much

[r] Sherlock's Use and Intent of Prophecy, p. 73.

higher than the merely literal import of the words. It implied an avenger, an avenger to be especially derived from the woman, one, who should maintain a continued enmity with the foe of mankind, and who, although he should himself receive some injury in the conflict, should be fully victorious in the end. As the seed of the woman, he must have been man. But as the conqueror of him, who was now known to be more than a mere serpent, he must also be of a nature superior to that, which had yielded to the tempter. As, too, this conqueror was to deliver mankind from the power of their enemy, the deliverance would be commensurate in all points with the evil which had been brought on them; and, this evil not being confined to temporal and immediate death, it seemed to follow that the reversal of their doom would extend to the reversal of some penalty, which was to have befallen them, not in their mortal nature, nor in their actual stage of existence; a consideration which, if other instruction had been wanting, involved the

doctrine of another life and a future judgment.

But, if we should suppose that these conclusions were more than would probably have been formed from the naked enunciation of the prophecy in question, we must next consider, that, even after the expulsion of man from paradise, God still deigned to hold direct communication with him. The sacred history, brief as it is, speaks of God conversing with the inhabitants of the early world; and speaks of it as a circumstance so much in the course of things, as to require no particular observation or comment. And, if this frequent intercourse subsisted, it is reasonable to suppose that subjects, which concerned the most essential interests of man, should be brought under review; and, in particular, that the original promise should be repeated, perhaps explicated and illustrated, and kept ever present to the minds of the faithful.

But beside the elucidation derived from such intercourse with God, we have evidence, if not quite decisive, yet of very con-

siderable and preponderating weight, that the original prophecy was further illustrated, and illustrated in a manner peculiarly suitable to the apprehensions and manners of a society in that state, which is always conversant with symbols and expressive acts, I allude to the rite of animal sacrifice. This must of necessity be referred to the very earliest times. We read of skins applied to the clothing of Adam and Eve[s]; nor, under all the circumstances of the case, and especially, when man was debarred from the use of animal food[t], is it easy to conceive from whence those skins should have been obtained, but from beasts slain in sacrifice; or for what purpose but that of sacrifice, flocks should have been tended. We read of animal sacrifice offered by a son of the first created man, and mentioned apparently as a matter familiar and customary. Through the patriarchal ages we have an account of similar offerings; and, as the

[s] Magee, vol. ii. p. 230. and authorities quoted.

[t] Magee, vol. ii. p. 31. &c.

families of the world separated and formed themselves into distinct communities, we find in most countries the same practice; a practice, so arbitrary, so little likely to have occurred spontaneously to the minds of all men, that we are driven to ascribe it to an ordinance originally given by God to our first parents, and from them derived, though with many admixtures and corruptions, to their descendants. Of the rite so instituted the design seems to have been to give a sensible and, as it were, scenical representation of the great sacrifice afterwards to be offered for the sins of the world by the true Lamb of God. In the animal slain on the altar, the earliest generations might have been taught to see in what manner the Seed of the woman should himself be bruised on the heel; and, in the piacular efficacy attached to its blood, in what manner he should bruise the head of the adversary. They might have been led to understand with some degree of clearness, how the Avenger, thus typically prefigured, should himself suffer death; but, by his death,

should redeem them from the penalty both of their original transgression and of their actual sins.

Such appears to have been the great outline of the primeval dispensation. On the whole, both in its substance and in its form, it appears exactly suited to the circumstances of the case. We see Religion descending from heaven, and descending in such form as we might expect in the infancy of the world, in all her native purity, without refinement, without artificial embellishment. In mercy to man, she draws aside that impenetrable veil, which would have concealed from his eyes the inmates of heaven; she discloses to his view the Most High in all his glorious attributes, and even gives him a faint glimpse of the Redeemer, nearly lost in the obscurity of distance. She instructs her disciple in language plain and simple, because such was the language that suited his capacity. She tells him what it immediately concerned him to know, and what, as advancing time should ripen his faculties, might prepare him for farther instructions in the great mystery of godliness.

In stating what appear to have been the circumstances that corrupted and gradually abrogated this religious system, and that led the way to a new disposition of the great plan of Providence, I may be permitted to be very brief; more particularly, as the light, which the scripture sheds on our inquiries, is extremely feeble and dim.

However pure and excellent was the revelation above attempted to be described, the provisions, that were made to preserve and maintain it, seem to have been adapted to a state, when the numbers of mankind were not considerable, and the manners, though not barbarous, were inartificial and plain. In fact, a system, in which we perceive the Almighty conversing directly with man, and interposing in a sensible manner in human transactions, bespeaks a period, when the restraints and sanctions, which political government imposes, were little called into action. The extraordinary prolongation of human life, designed as it should appear, for the express purpose of transmitting knowledge by tradition, indicates that such a provision was needed as a substitute for those means, by which, in cul-

tivated times, information is ordinarily conveyed. And if we add the other provisions for the maintenance of religion which the scripture seems to indicate; if we suppose that the glory of the Lord was permanently manifested on some fixed spot, near the scene of the former happiness of man, and that on this spot, as in a holy temple, the patriarchal chief offered on stated days the instituted sacrifices to God; such provisions could be effectual only so long as mankind had not spread themselves to any considerable distance from their original seats.

And for a considerable period it is reasonable to suppose that society was in such a state, as accorded with a religion thus simple in its organization and provisions. In the early part of this Lecture, I have supposed that man was at once placed by his gracious Creator above a condition of brutal debasement. But there is a distinct line of demarcation between barbarism and simplicity. If we suppose, as it is consistent with the general analogy of the divine government to suppose, that man, having received the first rudiments of knowledge,

was afterwards left to improve and advance himself by his own energies, his progress must necessarily have been gradual, and, for a considerable time, small. Besides, it is well known that population [u] is the great principle, which, by producing inequality of rank and property, sets the social system in busy and active motion. Now we surely should make vast deductions from those calculations, which would assign to any period of the primitive world millions of millions of inhabitants [x], a population far exceeding that of the present day. This could hardly have taken place under circumstances completely favourable to increase. But in the sentence of sterility then imposed on the earth in its full rigour [y]; in the state of husbandry, for a long while necessarily rude and unproductive; in the probable prevalence of the wild beasts of the field [z]; and, more than all, in the prohibition to man to add to his means of sub-

[u] Sumner, Records of the Creation, vol. ii. c. 5.
[x] Shuckford, vol. i. p. 32.
[y] See Sherlock's Use and Intent, p. 79. &c.
[z] See Deut. vii. 22.

sistence by animal food; in all these circumstances we, perhaps, may perceive checks to very active population, greater than would have been counteracted by the longevity of the human race, even if we suppose that longevity to have been as powerful an instrument for a rapid increase as is commonly supposed [a]. But, without entangling ourselves in speculations as to what may have been the numbers of mankind at a *late* period of the primitive world, it is at least clear that the increase from a single pair must have been progressive, and, for a considerable time, not sufficiently numerous to give a wide dispersion to the human race, or to introduce into society those great modifications, which constitute the distinction between simplicity and refinement.

And it is during that early period, when the numbers of mankind were small and their manners plain, that we may suppose the primitive religion to have existed and to have been maintained in its purity. God

[a] See Dr. Hales's observations on the probable age of puberty among the antediluvians. Anal. of Chron. vol. i. p. 85.

then visibly manifested himself among his creatures; and as there had not yet been time for the organization of civil government, the families lived under the simple rule of patriarchal authority. And, if in this state we see little play for those stirring passions of the human soul, which are instruments in the hand of Providence to carry mankind onwards on the career of knowledge and civilization, we likewise see little scope for the corruptions and crimes, which are too apt to keep pace with more advanced and refined manners.

But a state of tutelage, as it is a state of inaction and irresponsibility, can never be the theatre of trial. As time rolled on, as the numbers of mankind increased, society was destined to proceed, and man, at whatever hazard, must be placed in circumstances where he may act for himself. But as society seems to have advanced only so far as to unfit it for the sanctions of a simple religion, without, at the same time, establishing the coercions of regularly constructed schemes of polity, licentiousness and violence had little restraint, and the

depravation of man became deplorably great.

It deserves our attention, that even the brief notices of scripture seem to point out a remarkable coincidence between the progress of society in numbers and refinement, and a declension from the ancient purity of faith and manners.

We collect, and we collect principally from the light thrown by St. Paul on the otherwise obscure subject of the sacrifice of Cain and Abel [b], that the first-born man apostatized from the true faith. As a punishment, he was exiled from the spot where God visibly manifested his glory. And, as his race increased and multiplied, we trace the progress of their religious corruptions; by the determination of the Sethites to call themselves, in contradistinction, by the name of the Lord [c]; by the prophecy of Enoch, authenticated by St. Jude [d], respecting the judgment that awaited the ungodly sinners of his day; by the com-

[b] Heb. xi. 4.

[c] Gen. iv. 26. See the marginal translation.

[d] Verse 14, 15.

mission given to Noah to warn his contemporaries of the tremendous judgment, which their wickedness and impiety were about to bring down from heaven [e].

The progress also of moral deterioration has one distinct index in Lamech, who adopted the licentious practice of polygamy, and was himself a murderer. And the children of Lamech [f], correspondent in degree with the grandfather of Noah, mark, by the nature of their inventions, that the numbers of mankind were now sensibly augmented, and, at the same time, that manners were becoming less plain and unsophisticated.

And we are now approaching to the period, when the scripture distinctly tells us that population was become considerable, and, in the same breath, that wickedness sensibly increased. The sacred historian (speaking, it is clear, of a time not long prior to the flood) says, in a very remarkable text, *And it came to pass, when men begun to multiply on the face of the earth* [g]*;*

[e] 1 Pet. iii. 20. 2 Pet. ii. 5. [f] Gen. iv. 19—23.
[g] Gen. vi. 1.

and, immediately and in direct connection, notes a great step in the depravation of mankind, viz. the intermarriages of the purer line of Seth [h], denominated the sons of God, with the daughters of the more ungodly race of Cain. From these inauspicious alliances sprang personages, whose habits were lawless and violent, and who filled the earth with their outrages. And, the last separation between piety and impiety being thus broken down, we are come to the state which, according to our Saviour, characterized the closing period of the antediluvian world, when dissoluteness universally prevailed; when *they did eat, they drank, they did marry wives, they were given in marriage* [i]; the same state, concerning which the Almighty at the time still more emphatically declared, that *the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of his heart was only evil continually* [k].

At this period it was, when the whole human race had become depraved, when

[h] Gen. vi. 2. [i] Luke xvii. 26, 27. [k] Gen. vi. 5.

the ancient and simple faith, unable to cope with the growing corruptions, was altogether disappearing from the earth, that God interfered by a signal, by a tremendous visitation for the purposes of renewing the world. The whole race of man (with an exceedingly small exception) was to be destroyed. In so utter a destruction, the agency of man himself, which is often made instrumental in the hands of Providence for the punishment of human guilt, could not be employed. God, accordingly, interposed by a direct and immediate judgment; and the race of man was swept away by the flood.

When Noah issued from the ark, he was nearly in the same situation with the first parent of mankind immediately after the fall. With him the spark of religion was kept alive; with him the primitive faith was deposited; with him the covenant was renewed. We could not expect, nor in fact did it happen, that corruptions should not again arise and prevail. But the Almighty had pledged himself that such a visitation should not again be inflicted. It should

also appear that modifications in society, to which we shall hereafter advert, were permitted to take place. These modifications seemed to require a different arrangement of the great scheme of revelation. Another process for the preservation of religion and for the instruction of mankind was thenceforth to be tried. And we have now opening before us a new scene, which will be the subject of the ensuing Lecture.

LECTURE III.

DEUT. xxxii. 8, 9.

When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.
For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

AT the close of the last Lecture it was observed, that some circumstances, which began to operate after the flood, promised to give a new modification to human society. The general tendency of those circumstances was to introduce into the world a ferment and an activity before unknown. The life of man, though at first of considerable length, was gradually curtailed, till it was reduced to its present limits. The mitigation [a] of the curse of sterility to the earth, allowed a larger production of the

[a] See Sherlock's Use and Intent of Prophecy, p. 79, &c.

fruits necessary for the life of man;—while the permission to use animal food added to his means of subsistence. Under these circumstances, population would naturally advance more rapidly, and, by its reflex operation, would give a quicker stimulus to the productive arts, and a stronger impulse to all the wheels that set society in busy motion. The domestic rule might now have been expected to give place to more artificial and complex forms of polity. Accordingly, we soon hear of one, who *began to be mighty in the earth*[b]. And, although we surely must reject as fabulous the account of extended empires and mighty dynasties soon after the flood, yet our reasonable expectations concur with the accidental hints of scripture to assure us, that mankind were now forming themselves into political communities, and submitting to more regular governments. And, when the impious attempt to build the tower of Babel had produced the confusion of tongues, this diversity of language, as it would tend to sepa-

[b] Gen. x. 8.

rate mankind more and more into distinct associations, would still farther create the reciprocal action of hostilities and alliances, of enmity and friendship, together with all the excitement and animation arising from such oppositions and combinations; until, in process of time, conquest, commerce, arts, sciences, literature, and the general cultivation of the intellectual faculties, would gradually bring society into that state of advancement, which bespeaks the adolescence of human race.

But, although these changes in the state of the world occupy not many seconds in the statement, long centuries were required for their actual developement and completion. The germ of polity and civilization was discernible; but there was little more than the germ, for some centuries after the flood. For a considerable period of time the world remained in a rude state. And, in this state, there seems to be an almost invincible propensity in the human mind, unless it be coerced by direct interposition from above, to lapse into polytheism and idolatry. The original revelation had, in-

deed, stamped on the soul of man the idea of religion too deeply to be altogether effaced. But his faculties were weakened by sin; and the spiritual adoration of one divine, invisible, immaterial Being, was a point of elevation, at which he could not sustain himself without aid and support. Tending, therefore, as by natural gravitation, downwards, he sought relief in the worship of objects more perceptible to the sense,—the celestial luminaries, whose influence he felt,—or the ancestors, the potentates, the benefactors, whom he had regarded with various feelings of respect or gratitude. Many and great evils were inseparably inherent in this alienation of the human mind from the true God. And we, moreover, know from invariable experience, that time alone has never remedied those evils; that idolatry, if it has not declined from bad to worse, has never been able to reform itself, or altogether to abandon the absurdities, the impurities, the cruelties, which it has once adopted.

What then in this case was to be done? If any restraint were to be placed against

this tendency to idolatry, three processes, whereby it might be checked, suggest themselves to our mind. God might have interfered universally by a direct and sensible manifestation of himself; or the Messiah might at once have stationed himself on some spot of the earth, and from thence have issued an authoritative voice to all lands; or a partial dispensation might have been given to keep a select portion of mankind in the true faith, and to secure from the deluge of idolatry one station, where the Messiah, when he should come, *might rest the sole of his foot*[c]. Numerous other arrangements also might, we must be well aware, have been devised by Almighty wisdom. But these readily offer themselves to our thoughts; and even our limited vision can see valid reasons against the first and second of the courses supposed.

As to the first,—mankind were already become so numerous and so widely dispersed, and were fast tending to numbers so much greater, and to a dispersion so

[c] Gen. viii. 9.

much more extensive, that a sensible, that is, a miraculous interference must have been conducted on so large a scale, as to make miracles, not an exception and interruption to the ordinary course of Providence, but customary and regular; in other words, lose their essential character, and cease to be miraculous. As to the second,—for a long period the mind of man was not yet sufficiently advanced to comprehend all the great truths, which the Redeemer should bring to light. Moreover, the intercourse of nations was not such as to have permitted the diffusion of a religion designed to be universal. And, afterwards, when society was somewhat more advanced, and, at first sight, less unfit for the personal instructions of the Messiah, his coming may still have been postponed, that the experiment might be fairly made, whether nations, that could reach a high point of improvement in matters solely dependent upon human ingenuity, could, at the same time, succeed in rescuing themselves from the baneful influence of false religion; that so, if they should fail, as we

now know they did fail, there might arise a demonstrative proof of the necessity for a farther interposition from heaven to enlighten and instruct mankind.

The third supposition, that of a partial dispensation, appeared liable to none of these inconveniencies. It was a plan, by which, without making preternatural interference too common, without prematurely hastening the advent of the Redeemer, without denying to man a fair trial of his own powers, God might yet preserve faith on earth, and prepare the way for the coming of the promised Seed of the woman.

This, the second, great dispensation of God in the matter of revealed religion, we are now, therefore, to trace. The course lies directly and unavoidably before us. And if, as I have too much reason to apprehend, what I may have to offer on this subject shall appear trite, it should be remembered, that an attempt to discover new paths would probably lead me only into error; and, in pursuing a stage so frequently and so thoroughly beaten, it is im-

possible not to tread on the footsteps of others.

Of this dispensation we may state the principal objects to have been, first, to purify from the corruptions, which had gathered around them, the originally revealed truths of the existence and the providential agency of one Almighty Creator; and, second, as the time for the promised Redemption became less remote, to set forth the Redeemer more prominently, and in a more conspicuous light. These were its leading and direct objects. But we should further add, that, in this, as in other stages of the scheme of revelation, the Almighty availed himself of the religious dispensation then given, to establish or to strengthen some other great truths, conducive both to the immediate edification and to the prospective advancement of mankind.

And as, in the general scheme of revelation, the whole has been opened gradually, and in accordance with the actual circumstances of the world; so, in this particular dispensation, which itself was to spread over

a long tract of time, we may perceive the same character of progressive developement and of nice adaptation to the exigencies of those who were to receive it.

For this purpose, God established a direct communication, first, with a particular individual; next, with the immediate descendants of that individual; and, then, as those descendants multiplied into a people, with the people derived from the original ancestor. With that individual, with that family, and with that people, the divine intercourse was maintained, with the same objects ever steadily in view, but in a manner varying according to the varying circumstances of themselves and of the other nations. Their internal condition, as to numbers, civilization, and mental improvement, determined the mode and description of the divine communications to themselves. And in their relation to the rest of the world, so long as the human mind continued in that immature state, when it is peculiarly susceptible of the contagion of idolatry, the chosen people were made, in the language of the prophet, *to dwell alone*,

and not be reckoned among the nations[d]: afterwards, when the world was so far advanced, that it was probable the Israelites, instead of imbibing disease, might communicate health around, no less care was taken to remove some of the fences which had hitherto enclosed them, and to facilitate and promote their intercourse with other people.

This dispensation must be considered to have commenced with Abraham. I cannot, however, detain you with matter so very familiar as the personal history of the first patriarchs of the Jewish race. It may be sufficient merely to say, that, as Abraham was himself called out of idolatry,—as idolatry either prevailed or was rapidly advancing in the countries, into which he and *his household after him* were conducted,—and as no systematic form of religious polity could be established with a few private individuals, the Almighty conversed with them, as with the earliest generations of mankind, by direct and personal communi-

[d] Num. xxiii. 9.

cation. And in all his dealings with them, whether in affixing a sensible mark on their body, whether in the migratory habits which he imposed on the first fathers, or in the servitude and persecution to which their posterity were reduced in the land of Egypt,—in all, his object was to preserve them a peculiar and distinct tribe, till, being augmented into a nation, they should be fit, in their national capacity, to receive a system of religious and civil ordinances. By this process, they became better qualified to be depositaries of the great truths intended to be placed in their keeping. And, with Abraham at least, we know how well this process succeeded; since his faith in God is become proverbially honourable, and we have the testimony of our Lord himself, that he saw, and rejoiced to see, his day [e].

Let us then at once pass on to Moses, with whom a new and a highly interesting era commences, and who was used as an instrument in developing a very important part in the great counsel of God. The

[e] John viii. 56.

time, foreseen and specified by the Almighty, had now permitted the descendants of Abraham to swell into a nation. In this stage, a fuller revelation of divine things was to be made, and, the better to secure its preservation, was to be recorded in writing. The revelation itself was directed to the three great objects above specified. And when we proceed to look at the national establishment of the Jews, and more particularly to their religious institutions, if we will bear in mind that they were framed expressly with a view to those objects, and were, at the same time, to be imposed on a people, at first extremely rude, and to the end of time of dull and sluggish mind, we shall have a key, that will explain all the peculiarities, I may say, the seeming anomalies, of the Mosaic legislation.

I. Let us then look, in the first instance, to the measures adopted for the purpose of keeping the Jewish people in the genuine worship of the great Being, who from henceforth was to be known by a distinct and peculiar name.

1. On their departure from Egypt, they

were long detained in the desert, apart from all communication with other people; nor were they permitted to emerge from this state of sequestration, till there had grown up a generation, who had known no God but Jehovah, no minister of religion but his accredited prophet and agent; a generation also, whom a course of moral discipline should have rendered less unfit to enjoy the blessings of the promised land.

2. During their passage into their destined seats, the Israelites were favoured with that evidence to the truth of the divine revelation, which alone was likely to impress minds constituted like theirs,—the evidence of miracles. Abstract reasonings on the existence and the attributes of the Deity were little likely to have affected them. Prophecy, although not altogether withheld, was rather laid as a foundation for ulterior purposes, than applied to immediate use. But miracles, being addressed to the senses, were what the people could understand and appreciate. When they saw the wonderful

appearance of a cloud by day and a fire by night[f], that directed their marches; when they heard the Law given in thunder from Mount Sinai[g]; when they drank the water that gushed from the dry rock[h]; when they ate the flesh and the bread given in an extraordinary manner for their sustenance[i]; when they felt their diseases[k] removed by casting their eyes on the brasen figure of a serpent; then they were addressed in a tone and in a language which they could understand; they were convinced that He, who could do such things, must indeed be God, and that to a Being of such power it was their duty to render obedience and honour.

3. But, although these manifestations of *a mighty hand and an outstretched arm* could not fail to impress even the gross minds of the Israelites with the power of the divine Ruler, they were not of themselves sufficient to preserve that people from

[f] Exod. xiii. 21.
[g] Exod. xix.
[h] Exod. xvii. 6.
[i] Exod. xvi. 13.
[k] Num. xxi. 9.

an error, into which they were much disposed to run. At most times, their lapses into idolatry consisted, less in rejecting their own God, than in associating and combining him with others. They saw that the surrounding nations mutually adopted each other's deities, and even in some cases paid certain marks of respect to the Jehovah of Israel[1]. Hence, although the foreign deities might perhaps be inferior to their own, still, considering them as endued with superhuman power, they were willing to secure their favour and protection, and for this purpose to pay them a certain adoration; a laxity of allegiance to their own divine Ruler, to which they were the more attracted by the shewy and pleasurable, but licentious rites, which disgraced the worship of heathenism. But, as this intercommunity of religious rites was, not only derogatory from the majesty of God, but also directly opposed to the specific purpose for which the present revelation was imparted, the Almighty guarded against this danger

[1] 1 Sam. v. 7, &c.

with peculiar care by the nature of the religious institutions that he appointed. We can plainly see how well these institutions were, in several respects, adapted to the object in view.

1. In the first place, as being designed for a people too carnal for the refinements of a spiritual worship, the rites, while they were perfectly free from any impure admixture, were pompous and splendid. Even during their wanderings in the wilderness, care was taken that the furniture for the tabernacle [m], the utensils for sacred purposes, the dress of the priest, in short every thing appertaining to religious worship, should be calculated to impress the senses. And when, in process of time, the temple was built, we know that its architecture, its decorations, and the worship that was celebrated within its walls, rendered it one of the most magnificent and august spectacles, which the eye of man has ever beheld.

2. But, while care was thus taken, in modelling the Jewish rites, to excite a people of torpid mind, something more than the

[m] Exod. xxv. xxvi. xxvii. xxviii.

mere gratification of the eye was considered. The next thing to be noticed is the pains that were bestowed to distinguish their rites from those of the idolatrous nations around. This precaution runs throughout the Jewish ritual, and explains some points, on which it might seem an unreasonable stress was laid, were it not that they were commanded or prohibited,—partly perhaps with a symbolical meaning[n] in reference to certain habits of mind,—but still more in contradistinction to particular practices of idolatry, which it was intended to discountenance. As instances, we may mention various ordinances respecting [o] incongruous mixtures in processes of husbandry, respecting the classification [p] of clean and unclean beasts, respecting [q] some peculiarities of sacrifice, the structure of the altar [r], the dress of the priests, and even the disposition of their hair and beard [s].

[n] Scheme of Scripture-Divinity in Collection of Theological Tracts, p. 116.

[o] Deut. xxii. 9, 10.

[p] Lev. xi. 1. &c.

[q] Exod. xxiii. 19.

[r] Exod. xx. 25, 26.

[s] Lev. xix. 27.

3. But a still farther precaution was taken to keep God constantly in view of the Jewish people, by the very close and intimate connection of religion with the affairs of ordinary life. These could seldom be carried on without a reference to God. The first-born male [t], whether of man or cattle, was considered to belong to the Lord, and was to be redeemed by a price. The regulations respecting marriage [u], inheritance, and alliance; the relation of masters and servants [v], and the tenure of private property, were of a peculiar nature, and were directly connected with religion. Three times [x] in every year the males were required to suspend their employments in order to pay their worship at the holy city. The seventh day in every week was devoted to the more immediate service of God. Every seventh year all the occupations of husbandry stood still [y]; and, in the superabundant supplies of the preceding year [z], the people saw a standing and visible

[t] Exod. xxii. 29. xxxiv. 19.
[u] Num. xxvii. 1. xxxvi. 1.
[v] Lev. xxv. 39.
[x] Exod. xxiii. 16.
[y] Exod. xxiii. 10. &c.
[z] Lev. xxv. 21.

testimony to the truth of Jehovah. And when a sabbath of sabbaths returned [a], the liberation of slaves and the restoration of property to the former occupier served to make it difficult to be forgotten to whom the people belonged, and by what tenure the land was held. Even the ordinary means of national defence were prohibited [b], that the welfare of the people might be known to depend immediately upon their divine Protector.

4. Nor was it only as a God to be worshipped and considered on every occasion of ordinary life, that Jehovah exhibited himself to the Jews. He condescended to act as a sort of temporal king, judge, and captain over the people. He carried on his government by the ministry of the sacerdotal family, who, unlike the priests of idolatrous religions, were an order of men professionally distinct from the rest of the community. And, in the earlier part of the Jewish history, the judges, magistrates who may not improperly be called spiritual

[a] Lev. xxv. 11. &c. [b] Deut. xvii. 16.

dictators, were commissioned by the sovereign ruler, as various emergencies arose, to execute some extraordinary service for the people.

5. Of this mode of administering the Jewish government, the consequence was, that, as it was in the hands of One who controlled the destinies of the whole human race, the obedience or disobedience of the people might always have its measure of reward in temporal prosperity or adversity. Nor, according to the notions then prevalent, when the deities were supposed to be protectors and guardians locally presiding over their several districts, and each tutelary God was considered strong in proportion to the protection which he visibly extended, could there be devised any means more calculated to keep the Jews in allegiance to their heavenly king. When he said, that if they obeyed him, their cattle should be numerous[c], their land fruitful, their families prolific, their armies victorious, this argument was not only cogent,

[c] Exod. xxiii. 25. Lev. xxvi. 4, &c.

but suited to the spirit of the times. So, too, when he said that, if they disobeyed him [d], every national and every personal calamity should befall them, this was to apply motives intelligible, and likely to touch and move them. Nor, under these circumstances, was it necessary to excite them to the observance of their duty toward their God by considerations of a more refined and spiritual nature. Where a system of temporal and immediate reward and punishment was brought forward and really carried into execution, it was not necessary, for the purpose of proving the existence or the moral attributes of God, to appeal from the present to the future, from the irregularities of the existing state of things to the retribution, which is yet to come. Accordingly, the doctrine of a future existence and retribution made no part of the Mosaic dispensation; I mean, as specifically distinguished from the dispensation which preceded it. I do not mean to assert that the doctrines of the survivance of the hu-

[d] Deut. xi. 16, 17

man soul and of a judgment after death were unknown to the Jews, even in the earlier stages of their history. Several [e] distinct indications of their knowledge on these points may be traced in their sacred books. And, if it be inquired why these indications do not appear more frequently and more prominently, it may be remembered, that the writings of Moses [f] are chiefly occupied in narrating events or in propounding laws; circumstances, under which there seems to be no reason why a reference to their opinions as to a future state should be more frequently made, than is made in the narrative of other historians or the code of other legislators. What the Jews knew or thought on these points appears only incidentally, just as their knowledge or thoughts on other points of religious philosophy may appear. Their knowledge had been derived from the earlier communications respecting divine things, which had been made to the first patriarchs,

[e] See Graves's Lectures on the Pentateuch, Lec. iv. sect. 1, 2.

[f] See Faber on the Dispensations, vol. ii. p. 84.

and from them handed down to their descendants. And, as the people were not absolutely in need of renewed information on that subject, the Mosaic revelations were confined to the other objects, which were then more immediately and more especially in the contemplation of God.

II. The first of these objects, viz. the preservation of the knowledge of the great Jehovah, we have now reviewed, and have traced the principal means that were taken for its attainment. But another and perhaps more influential object remained. A belief in the one true God was principally laid as a foundation, on which to rear the superstructure of the revelation of Christ. But the views of that subsequent revelation were opened exactly as suited the circumstances and condition of the people, who were to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. At first, as might be expected on consideration of the time that was to intervene before Christ should be revealed, as might also have been expected from a view of the actual character of the Jewish people, the light, that pointed to him, was

feeble and wavering. But God, even at a distant period, did not leave himself without the testimony of prophecy; at the time, to animate the passing generation with hope for the future; afterwards, to afford a retrospective argument for the truth of his word. When he had called Abraham out of Chaldæa, he promised, not only, that the posterity of the patriarch should *be numerous, and should possess the gate of his enemies*, but also that *in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed*[g]. The inheritor of the blessing, distinctively termed *the blessing of Abraham*[h], transmitted it to his son Jacob; and Jacob[i], in nearly a similar form of words, transmitted it to Judah out of all his sons; thus narrowing the hope of the promised Seed, which before had been common to all the Abrahamic race, to one particular tribe, in like manner as the same hope was, in after-times, narrowed from that tribe in general to one of its families. And at the period, when the Israelites were ripe to take possession of

[g] Gen. xxii. 17. [h] Gen. xxviii. 4. [i] Gen. xlix. 8.

their temporal inheritance, the Almighty, apprehensive lest the people should imagine they had reached the termination of their destinies, selected that moment to inform them by his servant Moses, that, high as was the authority of their present lawgiver, there should yet be raised up another prophet [k], to whom they should give ear.

With a view also to keep this prospect before their eyes, and, at the same time, to effect the purpose in a manner suited to a people of gross conceptions, yet, like all orientals, deeply impressible by symbols and signs, there was formed a ritual, which may be called a visible prophecy almost throughout. Of the festivals, the sacrifices, the ceremonies, many were, and probably were understood to be, types and representations of future incidents; such as were the Passover; the offering [l] of the one goat, and the dismission of the other into the wilderness, with the iniquities of the people on his head; the Atonement made by the high priest for the sins of himself and of the na-

[k] Deut. xviii. 18. [l] Lev. xvi.

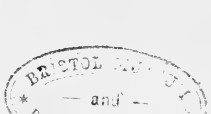
tion; with many other sacrificial rites too numerous now to be specified. Even the personages that appear in the history, as Moses, Joshua, David, and others, were a sort of representatives, in their several characters and capacities, of Him who was afterwards to arise. And if these prophetic rites and these prophetic personages, while they spoke of something to come, spoke of it in such a tone as to convey no very distinct apprehensions to the men of the earlier time, matters were so arranged, that, when the light, arising from the system of a particular providence, became more faint, it should be replaced by an increase of the light of prophecy, which, as time advanced, begun to be imparted more largely, and to point with more precise direction to the coming Messiah. In order also to give additional credit to the prophetic office, as well as to prevent the people from sinking into despair at seasons of national calamity, such times were generally marked by an effusion more than ordinary of the spirit of prophecy. Again, lest the distance of the period, to which the accom-

plishment of the master prophecy was thrown back, should weaken the faith of the people in the divine promises, there were intermixed with the predictions respecting the Messiah others respecting both the internal state of Judea and also several surrounding states, with whose destinies those of the Israelites were closely connected; that so, as the predictions respecting their own country, respecting Moab, Edom, and Amalek, or, in later times, respecting Nineveh, Tyre, Egypt, and Babylon, were accomplished, this accomplishment might exhibit a direct demonstration of the truth of prophecy, and might induce those for whose sake it was exhibited, to carry their hopes and their faith onwards to the period when the long expected Messiah should appear. Again, in some cases, the nearer and more distant future were conjoined; the prophecies bearing a double sense, of which the one regarded the proximate, the other the remote, event, the one had a temporal, the other a spiritual import. And, throughout, the prophets, beside their more immediate and peculiar office, were com-

missioned to be preachers of righteousness in succession to their contemporaries; to deal forth commendation or reproof; to supply the brevity of the Mosaic code by farther instruction in morals; and especially to open the minds of the people, as their minds should become capable of larger views, to a spiritual, to an evangelical, interpretation of the prophecies.

These various processes were used to give effect to the testimony of prophecy respecting Jesus. Nor were these processes without success. In the course of time, not only the prophets themselves, who must be supposed always to *have inquired and searched diligently*[m], to comprehend the nature of that glory which they were commissioned to announce; nor only those schools of the prophets, which were established to promote the knowledge of religious truth; but the great body of the Israelites, came to be so well acquainted with the offices, the history, the era of the Messiah, that their views resembled more a knowledge of the

[m] 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.



past, than an anticipation of the future. And, this point being gained, in like manner as the particular providence had ceased, when, by its sensible interpositions and temporal dispensations, it had succeeded in fixing the people in the faith of Jehovah; so, when the repetition of prophecies had served to fix the people in the faith of the coming Messiah, the spirit of prophecy also ceased. Besides, the Jews had gradually become a more cultivated and generally enlightened people. Linked, and, as we shall farther see in the ensuing Lecture, providentially linked, at many points of contact, with nations better instructed than themselves in most questions of human knowledge, they had profited by the connection; and, advancing with the advancing state of the world, they had reached the period of their national manhood. And, care having been already taken to establish them in the belief of God and in the expectation of the Messiah, they now were also placed by divine providence in such a state as to their mental capacity in general, that the blindness would be wilful, and,

consequently, the blame would rest only with themselves, if they did not adequately comprehend the great truths, which the Messiah, when he came into the world, should reveal.

III. Thus far we have considered the Jewish economy as it was directly instrumental to the main purpose of the intended redemption. But we have repeatedly stated, that, in all the preparatory dispensations of religion, the divine wisdom has also contrived to involve other matter, which should be generally conducive to the instruction and improvement of the human kind. And, in the present instance, we should very inadequately exhibit the use and design of the Jewish dispensation, if we did not add, that, while the Almighty led the way, through the medium of the children of Israel, to a farther developement of doctrinal truth, he also laid, with the same people, the foundation for an improvement more particularly in moral science. At the time when he wrote with his own finger the commandments especially regarding his own honour and worship, he added a second

table respecting the duties of man to man. And, if we will consider that this was the earliest code of written law existing in the world, and will examine that code, not merely in its positive injunctions, but in the extensive and spiritual meaning in which it was designed to be understood, it justly challenges our admiration. Nor were the precepts of morality confined to the Decalogue. The Law abounds, throughout, with directions for the conduct of life, and with exhortations to holiness, interwoven with the religious commandments. And, if we would see how far the code of Moses outran the morality of other nations even in later and more cultivated times, how much it breathed by anticipation the spirit of the Gospel, let us recollect that our Lord himself, at times, was contented with restoring[n] the former precepts to their genuine and original meaning, and that he even borrowed[o] from the Law his favourite, his invaluable rule, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Neither is this rule single and

[n] Matt. xv. 4, &c. [o] Lev. xix. 18.

insulated, but is one out of numerous injunctions of a similar tone. Let us recollect the tender consideration of the Mosaic code for the [p] stranger and the bondsman [q], urged on the people by the touching argument, that they had themselves been strangers and bondmen in the land of Egypt. Let us recollect its considerable regard for the poor in various directions, not to reap the corners of the field [r], not to gather every grape of the vineyard [s], not to withhold the wages of the hired servant [t], directions enforced with the awful sanction, *I am the Lord thy God.* Let us recollect [u] its injunction to rise up before the hoary head, and to honour the face of an old man. Let us recollect its cautions against oppressing or wronging the fatherless or widow [x]. Let us recollect its beautiful provisions against unfeeling conduct toward debtors [y], by forbidding the creditor to go into his house to fetch the pledge. Let us recollect its di-

[p] Lev. xix. 33, 34.
[q] Deut. xv. 15.
[r] Lev. xix. 9.
[s] Lev. xix. 10.
[t] Lev. xix. 13.
[u] Lev. xix. 32.
[x] Deut. xxiv. 17, &c.
[y] Deut. xxiv. 10, &c.

rections for befriending even an enemy [z], and its exquisite delicacy toward female captives taken in war [a]. Let us recollect that it extends its tender mercies even to the inferior animals; that it enjoins a rest for cattle as for men on the Sabbath-day, and forbids the people to muzzle the ox that treadeth the corn [b], or to destroy the dam, when they have occasion to take the young birds [c].

And, in tracing the series of persons, who, after Moses, acted under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, we shall still find, that, while they spake of things directly appertaining to religious doctrine, they also made it a part of their office to expose and denounce vice, and to expound, enlarge, and enforce the requisitions of morality. To this the whole canon of the ancient scriptures bears testimony. But there are two works more particularly of an ethical nature, that should not be passed by without especial notice; I mean, the Proverbs and

[z] Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.
[a] Deut. xxi. 14.
[b] Deut. xxv. 4.
[c] Deut. xxii. 6.

the book of Ecclesiastes. Some centuries before certain philosophers of Greece, by a few moral aphorisms, acquired the title of wise men, these works existed; and, by the sagacity of their observations on men and manners, by their excellent precepts for the conduct of life, and, more than all, by their reference of all moral obligation to the supreme will of God, they breathe that wisdom and understanding, which, it is expressly said, their author received from the Lord [d].

The like observations might be applied to the sacred poetry of Israel. At present, I do not speak of the inspired bards merely in their prophetical capacity. I speak of them also as the teachers of moral wisdom. And, if we will compare their strains with the songs of pagan poets addressed to their deities, with the hymns, for instance, of Homer or Callimachus, we cannot fail to be struck, not only with the superior grandeur of their imagery, but with the higher tone of pure devotion and of noble sentiment that is breathed by the muse of Sion.

[d] 1 Kings iii. 12.

These points might receive a much more ample illustration. But, as we have already seen how the dispensation now under review prepared the way for the manifestation of the Redeemer; so what has been said may enable us summarily to note, how the same dispensation, by the general character of its doctrines and laws, served, at the same time, to promote the great design of Providence for the progressive instruction and advancement of the human race.

First of all, we perceive God known and recognised in his true character. His unity forms the leading principle of the whole system; it meets us in every point; it is repeated word upon word, line upon line; and is made the basis, not only of all religious worship, but of all moral obligation. The providential agency of God in superintending and directing the system of the universe, his spirituality, his omnipotence, his eternity, his wisdom, his purity, are also powerfully asserted. And, more than all [e], the

[e] See in particular that very sublime passage, "And "the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The "Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering "and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for

reconciliation of his justice with his mercy, the process, by which two attributes, seemingly incompatible, are made to unite together without confusion and without mutual injury; this it is, that constitutes the distinguishing feature, as of the scheme of divine revelation in general, so especially of the Jewish dispensation. And this important subject it illustrates, by throwing a strong and continually increasing light on the great doctrine of the Atonement.

So also to the Jews it was taught how to worship the great Being, thus worthily exhibited before them, with pure and holy rites. On the altar of Jehovah no human victim ever bled. With his worship no impurities, no debaucheries, were intermixed. His ritual was never made the instrument for promoting designs of worldly policy by delusive and fraudulent practices. Nor, under his religion, were external observances ever represented as substitutes for inward holiness and practical obedience.

" thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and " sin, and *that will by no means clear the guilty.*" Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

And, as the faith of the Jews was thus pure, and their worship thus holy, so the great cause of virtue was promoted both by the character of their moral law, and by the basis on which its was placed. While the precepts were in themselves most excellent, and in advance before the morality of their age, they were at the same time commanded to be practised on the proper ground of religious obedience, and with the sole view of serving and pleasing God.

These surely are great steps in the science of sacred philosophy. These grand truths, once recognised and received as articles of religious belief, are calculated to give no slight elevation and impulse to the human mind. In the case now before us, we cannot but adore the wisdom of God, who, in prosecuting his great scheme of redeeming love, so arranged his measures, as to advance, at the same time and by the same process, the landmarks of that knowledge, on which the improvement of mankind mainly depends. And to this wisdom we shall be yet more disposed to pay our humble tribute of admiration, when we farther and in conclu-

sion observe, that the instructions, true to their constantly prevailing design, served at once to enlighten mankind according to their immediate need, and also to fit and prepare them in due time to receive a fuller measure of religious and moral information.

At present the purpose was not to reveal, as a new doctrine, the existence of some supreme power. That had been made known by the primeval revelations respecting God. Neither was it to teach, that the Deity should be worshipped and certain duties of morality discharged. However imperfectly understood, however inadequately carried into practice, these truths did not remain now to be learned in their first elements. But on these subjects there prevailed much ignorance, and yet more error. Accordingly, the present dispensation tended to teach these things in their purity and integrity, in marked contradistinction to certain prevalent corruptions, and with additional precision and expansion. With a view to the propensity of mankind, not to deny, but to multiply, God,

it especially taught that he was one. With a view to their propensity to suppose, that, if there were one supreme Deity, he delegated the providential government of the world to certain inferior agents, it taught that He acted by his own immediate and single authority. With a view to various misconceptions respecting the character of God, it taught that he was holy, just, and good. With a view to the highly objectionable rites, by which mankind sought for pardon or favour from Heaven, it taught how God should be worshipped, and how remission of sins could be obtained. With a view to the narrow and grosser conceptions of mankind on the subject of the moral duties, it purified and exalted those duties, it enlarged their sphere of operation, it gave them a new direction, and, in particular, it endeavoured, gradually and as society could bear it, to correct that harsh, that stern, that unfeeling character, which almost always distinguishes the intercourse of man with man in a low state of knowledge and civilization.

To the other great principle in the pro-

ceedings of the Almighty it is enough merely to advert. Even if I did not feel that I had already too far trespassed on your time, it would be only an anticipation of what should follow, to do more than simply state, that these great doctrines obviously were preparatory to that future dispensation, which should yet more distinctly teach that God should be worshipped *in spirit and in truth;* and that, as fuller instructions in the law of righteousness were vouchsafed, and man was furnished with farther aid to carry that law into practice, he should aspire to a perfection of purity and benevolence, far beyond his former endeavours, and not short of the standard even of God himself.

LECTURE IV.

PSALM xcvi. 10.

Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King.

OUR two preceding Lectures have led us to see, first, that a divine revelation was originally given in common to the whole race of man, and, next, that when the circumstances of the world seemed to require some more precise and definite, though less general, communication of religious knowledge, such a dispensation was given to one people selected from the rest of the nations. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to suppose, that some faint and imperfect memorials of the original revelation should have long subsisted in the world at large. Neither is it inconsistent with the declared purposes of God, in regard to the children of Abraham, to suppose that the dispensation, given immediately to that people, should, at the same time, have been

designed to have a secondary and indirect influence on other parts of the world. Indeed, as the Gentile nations were intended to be partakers equally with the Jews of the great salvation that was to follow, we might naturally expect that the course of Providence should have been so ordered, that they should receive some benefit from the religious instructions vouchsafed to the chosen people; that they should catch some rays issuing from the central luminary of divine truth.

These are the points which I would endeavour to illustrate in the present Lecture. My object is to shew, that however, after the flood, the nations wandered into errors in religion, the traces of the original revelations were not entirely obliterated, even among them; to shew also, and in a more particular manner, that, although the Jewish dispensation was addressed directly to the descendants of Abraham, its operation was not entirely local, nor without an indirect influence on other parts of the world; and that some of the leading events of Gentile history were moulded with the

express view of giving strength and efficacy to that influence.

These views must necessarily be taken in our attempt to trace the bearings of general history on the question of revealed religion. At the same time, they will carry our eye over so extensive a field, that it will be impossible to give to the several objects that full examination, which, under other circumstances, they might properly claim.

In the first place, it is clear that the primitive faith [a] continued to subsist at least for some time after the flood. Neither the knowledge of the true God, nor such expectations of the promised deliverer as had been given to men, could at once have been lost among the descendants of Noah. At whatever time and in whatever manner polytheism arose, its progress certainly was gradual; and some portion of the pure stream of religion kept itself a while unmixed with the foul and turbid pool of superstition. Long after idolatry was prac-

[a] See Horsley's Dissertation on the Prophecies of the Messiah, p. 43. &c.

tised [b], Melchizedek, the first [c] and the second Abimelech—not private individuals, but sovereign rulers, had a knowledge more or less perfect of the true God. It appears also that He was not unknown to Laban [d]; and in the Egyptian midwives [e], in Jethro [f], in Rahab [g], and perhaps in some other personages incidentally noticed in scripture, we perceive witnesses to the true faith in the midst of an idolatrous generation. The Book of Job, whatever may have been its precise date, indicates that, although the worship [h] of the sun and moon was then introduced into Idumæa, it was a taint, from which the patriarch, and, it should appear, his family and his friends were free. Nor is this all, Job [i] himself, and, at a period probably later, the Mesopotamian Balaam [k], speak even of the future Redeemer. This circumstance is very remarkable. And, while it shews that, at

[b] Gen. xiv. 18.
[c] Gen. xx. 4. xxvi. 28, 29.
[d] Gen. xxiv. 31.
[e] Exod. i. 17.
[f] Exod. xviii. 12.
[g] Joshua ii. 9.
[h] Job xxxi. 26. &c.
[i] Job xix. 25.
[k] Num. xxiv. 17.

the respective periods of those two prophets, the expectation of the promised seed survived beyond the pale of the chosen family, it is probable their predictions became an important instrument, by which that traditional knowledge of some great personage to come, which, it is notorious, was subsequently current among the nations, was preserved and propagated.

Unquestionably, however, the deluge of idolatry at length *prevailed, and greatly increased upon the earth.* Yet even idolatry, at its commencement, if not throughout its whole course, seems to have received a certain tinge and colour from scriptural truth.

In supposing that the Pagan deities were often the real personages of sacred history, and that many fables recorded of those deities were grounded on facts authenticated by the inspired historian; in such a supposition, I am aware how easily we may be deceived by imperfect and even fictitious accounts of people, with whom we are inadequately acquainted; and that, even where the documents are unimpeachable,

it is not difficult to warm the imagination into a belief, that faint and perhaps accidental coincidences between the sacred and profane narratives are fraught with deep and important matter. On this account it is unquestionably proper to be extremely cautious, to make large deductions on the score of fancy, and even of our own prepossessions, in applying the key of scripture to open the dark and recondite stores of pagan mythology. But, with the deepest convictions of this truth, we still may state it as highly probable that the groundwork of much of paganism is the real events recorded by Moses. A few points at least seem to rest on a foundation perfectly solid. The mythological systems of various people, who eventually occupied widely distant regions, have yet such a degree of uniformity, as evinces that they proceeded from one common origin. This observation applies to the mythologies of India, Egypt, Greece, and Italy, perhaps we may add, of the Teutonic and Celtic nations; and it extends to points at once so minute and so arbitrary, as preclude the probability of a coincidence

altogether accidental. Again, these mythologies, with a family likeness among themselves, seem also by their resemblance to the Mosaic history, at once the most ancient and the most authentic in the world, to betray the parentage from whence they sprang. They speak of a primeval period [k] of innocence and happiness, of a lapse from that state, and even, in some instances, of a lapse occasioned by female indiscretion. They speak of a flood [l], which destroyed the whole world with the exception of a single family, without omitting the peculiarity of the ark, or even some more minute circumstances [m] that belong to the Mosaic deluge. They speak also of personages, in whom we can hardly fail to recognise the features, sometimes of Adam, sometimes of Noah and his sons, and sometimes of the first and second fathers of the human race combined;

[k] See several instances collected in Mr. Faber's Origin of Pagan Idolatry, vol. ii. p. 11. &c.

[l] See authorities of various degrees of force in Bryant's Analogy of Ancient Mythology, chap. On the Deluge, vol. ii. p. 195. &c. particularly the extract from Lucian, De Dea Syria, tom. iii. p. 458. Hemsterhusii.

[m] Bryant, vol. ii. p. 283. &c.

since between the two there were in reality so many points of resemblance, that it would not be difficult for the fabling genius of idolatry to suppose that the one revived in the other, when a new world arose from the ruins of a former system, and the revolution of time brought around a recurrence of the same events and a re-appearance of the same personages. Now, as the uniformity of these several mythologies among themselves seems to assign their origin to a period, when the same events were known and were interesting to all men, that is, when the inhabitants of the world were few, and closely concentrated; so their resemblance to the scriptural narrative indicates that the period, to which they belong, is none other than that, of which we have an authoritative account in some of the earlier chapters of Genesis. And hence we are led to believe that paganism in its origin, sprang not so much from mere fiction, as from a corruption of the truth; that the events of real history were less forgotten than corrupted; and that the deities were beings not purely

imaginary, but rather the primordial parents of mankind, whom, under different names, and with the addition of various legends, but with attributes essentially the same, their descendants came in process of time to worship with divine honours.

And this, which appears to have been the true state of the case, accords with what we might, antecedently, have expected to be the course and progress of idolatry. That theory, which supposes the several deities to have been mere personifications of the different attributes and influences of the supreme God, is apparently of too refined and subtle a nature for the early period, of which we are now speaking; and seems rather to belong to a later age, when men were not unacquainted with the secret operations of nature, when they were advancing in intellectual cultivation, and were desirous, in the way of apology[n], to give something like a philosophical explanation to the superstitious absurdities, of which they begun to be ashamed. There is greater

[n] Bossuet, Disc. sur Hist. Univer. tom. ii. p. 119.

probability in the supposition that the true foundation of idolatry was something more tangible, more substantial. The idea of a God, who had manifested himself on earth, the idea even of a celestial personage, who at some period was to appear in the human form, and to act an important part in the world, were deeply impressed on mankind by the original revelation. And it is less likely that men should have set about, first to create, and then to deify and worship, a number of ideal phantoms, than that, familiarized with the thought of God conversing with man, and thence confounding and perplexing the truth, they should suppose some emanation of the Deity to have resided in the ancestors, who had held a conspicuous station in the early annals of the world. From the superstitious honours paid to those ancestors they might afterwards have proceeded, step by step, into the farther errors of idolatry. They might next have converted those venerated personages into intelligences that informed and actuated the heavenly luminaries. And when the mind of man was once loosened from re-

straint in religious matters, new deities would then perpetually arise out of the events of national history, out of the artifices of priests and statesmen, out of the great phenomena of nature, and even out of the fanciful imagery of the poets; deities, which of course would vary according to the circumstances and the tastes or caprices of the various people, who adopted them. Nor is it until we are arrived at these regions of pure fiction, that all becomes trackless and inexplicable, and that we are left without any clue to guide us through the intricate maze of idolatrous worship.

And one religious practice of very general prevalence we clearly derive from the scripture; I mean the slaughter of animals in piacular and expiatory, as well as in eucharistical, sacrifice. If we expunge from our memory what we have learned on this subject from our Bible, it will be extremely difficult to account for the fact, which nevertheless we know to be true, that, throughout various systems of paganism, however diversified the objects and the

modes of worship, and however distant the places where the rite obtained,—still there existed the practice of immolating victims to the deities to avert their wrath, or to propitiate their favour. So important indeed was this mode of worship considered, that it was supposed the victim could never be too costly, and that the power of gaining acceptance would be enhanced, if, in offering it, the feelings of nature were vanquished, if man bled by the hand of man, and even the child by that of the parent. To those sacrifices there also were added various pageantries and solemnities, not unfrequently connected with the grossest profligacy, and indeed peculiarly acceptable on this very account to the corrupt nature of man. For these barbarities, for these indecencies, I need hardly say that the original institution of sacrifice was not accountable. But how the rite itself should have occurred to man [o], and to man under such varieties of situation and manners, ex-

[o] For the prevalence of animal sacrifice, see Faber's Origin of Pagan Idolatry, book ii. chap. 8. &c. See also Magee on Atonement, n°. 5, 33, 55, 56.

cept from its original institution with our first parent, it is not easy to guess. With him it was instituted to prefigure the great sacrifice to be offered for the sins of man by the promised Redeemer. From thence it was derived into the various systems of idolatry. And, although its original and true import was forgotten, although it was corrupted and deteriorated, still, as the several mythologies, however clouded by superstition, tended to keep alive in the minds of men some notion of the Deity; so the animal offerings, even in their debased state, served, in some manner, to prepare the way for the great sacrifice, that was afterwards to be made in the person of the Redeemer. They accustomed mankind to the idea of vicarious atonements, and to the practice of averting guilt from the head of the transgressor by the death of an unoffending victim.

Thus far we have supposed that the original revelation infused itself into various systems of paganism, particularly in their earlier stages. But at length the shades of superstition, not only set in deeper and

thicker, but proceeded to envelope the wide earth. The darkest gloom may be stated to have been at that period, when the nations had receded the farthest from the lights of the primeval revelation, and the lights of science and philosophy had yet scarcely dawned. But mankind was not left in this forlorn state. There is a point of depression in human affairs, from which the providence of God generally commences a new and better order of things. As knowledge arose, and the human mind acquired a certain degree of maturity and strength, some superior intellects began to entertain juster notions respecting the divine nature. They were led to suspect the falsehood of the popular idolatries, and to discern, dimly and faintly, through the mists of superstition, the one supreme God. It is not to be supposed that their apprehensions approached to the purer conceptions entertained and professed by the Israelites. Nor should we suppose that they shocked their contemporaries by an open avowal of their better faith. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that

their system of religious philosophy was generally esoteric; a system, whereby tenets, that were studiously withheld from the vulgar, were communicated to a favoured and initiated few, generally under the veil of symbols and allegories, and always with injunctions of the strictest secrecy. That these mysteries were in many instances [p] profaned to the most flagitious purposes, there is but too much reason to believe. Yet it is also probable that some were of a purer and more creditable character. And such information as we can now collect respecting them tends to shew that they generally consisted of a sort of dramatic representation of some event [q], which, in its various circumstances, seems to bear the nearest resemblance to the destruction and renovation of the human race at the great historical epoch of the flood. And it should moreover appear, that the greater mysteries [r], communicated to the more fully enlightened the important se-

[p] Leland's Christian Revelation, vol. ii. p. 194, &c.
[q] Faber's Origin of Pagan Idolatry, vol. iii. p. 111.
[r] Divine Legation, vol. i. book 2. sect. 4.

crets that the deities of the popular worship had once been men, that God was one and supreme, and that the soul of man was immortal, and destined to a future state of reward and punishment.

Nor was this system confined to single states. As knowledge extended itself, and as the intercourse of nations, at once the effect and the cause of that knowledge, increased, this esoteric philosophy seems to have prevailed very generally in the heathen world. And, although I am aware that I am treading over ground where there is room for much fanciful conjecture, yet it does appear highly probable, that, while the external idolatries were variously modified in the different countries, there arose an internal doctrine, containing much truth, and extending itself, with a considerable degree of uniformity, from India through Persia, Phœnicia, and Egypt, to Greece, and perhaps to some of the more western regions of Europe.

The question that concerns our present purpose is, from whence was this better knowledge in religious matters acquired?

The time is certainly passed when every human art and science will be deduced from the storehouse of scripture[s]; when astronomy, geometry, navigation, architecture will be supposed to have been first understood and taught by the personages recorded in the sacred volume. But there appears to be no such improbability in supposing that, as religious knowledge had originally been revealed from on high, so, in later times, the course of events was so regulated, that the subsequent illumination from heaven came in aid of the rising beams of science; and that the two lights, united, found a passage into the secret recesses of many a temple dedicated to idolatry, where, while the rays were carefully skreened from common eyes, they enabled the interpreters of sacred things to see their way through some of the darkness which had gathered around the profane vulgar.

In order to make this supposition less improbable, it may be useful to consider,

[s] Gale's Court of the Gentiles, vol. i. book 1. c. 2.

though as briefly as possible, the case of the Jewish people in their relation toward foreigners [t].

The very nature of the Israelitish rites prevented them from being adopted by foreign states. But the Jews, even from the beginning, were far from objecting to receive strangers among themselves. Without entering at present into the distinction between the *proselyte of the gate* and the *proselyte of righteousness*, it is enough to say, that when the covenant was first established with Abraham [u], and when the passover was instituted with Moses [v], in both instances, provisions were expressly made for admitting *the stranger* to a participation of the Jewish sacraments; and, afterwards, it was farther ordered that he should enjoy equally with the Jew the privileges of the sabbatical rest [w], of the feasts and sacrifices [x], of the cities of refuge [y], of judicial protection [z]. In these respects, the Jewish

[t] See Jenkin's Reasonableness and Certainty of Christian Religion, vol. i chap 2.

[u] Gen. xvii. 12. 27.

[v] Exod. xii. 49.

[w] Exod. xx. 10.

[x] Deut. xvi. 11. Lev. xvi. 29.

[y] Num. xxxv. 15.

[z] Deut. i. 16.

polity, so far from appearing unsocial and uncommunicative, exhibits an honourable contrast to the exclusive spirit of many other states, that have acquired the applause and admiration of mankind.

Even in early times, this liberal temper of the Jewish church could not have been without effect in making its peculiar system of faith, in some degree, known. But, in order to illustrate the point now particularly in question, we should look to times, when the opportunities of foreign intercourse became greater; and, for this purpose, we may at once pass on to the splendid reign of Solomon. From a census taken by that monarch, it appears that the strangers then settled in his kingdom amounted to *an hundred and fifty thousand and three thousand and six hundred*[a]. The dominions directly subject to the sceptre of Solomon, and his commerce with foreign states, were also very extensive. And, when we farther consider the number and the rank of the persons who resorted to his

[a] 2 Chron. ii. 17.

court; nay, when we read that *all the earth sought to Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart*[b]; we must suppose that these circumstances would give a considerable degree of credit and circulation to the Jewish faith.

But there are two people, to whom we should more particularly direct our attention; because, frightful and absurd as were their popular superstitions, they appear to have been the principal channels for conveying to other nations the secret doctrines to which we have above adverted. And, if it should be thought they derived any part of their better knowledge from communication with Israel, we shall perceive one important point, wherein the particular dispensation of religion given to the Jews became instrumental to the purposes of general instruction. I allude to the Phœnicians and Egyptians.

Now to the former of these people it is evident that affinity of language, close vicinity, commercial intercourse and political

[b] 1 Kings x. 24.

alliances afforded constant facilities for becoming acquainted with the religious tenets of the Israelites. The communication between the two countries was particularly great during the more prosperous times of Israel. And, although I am well aware that this intercourse produced occasionally a sinister influence on the Jewish people, still it is difficult to believe that the superior faith of Israel should not have excited attention and respect, from time to time, in some reflecting minds in the neighbouring and friendly country.

In the latter of those two countries, in Egypt, the long administration and the powerful influence of Joseph, and the subsequent residence of the children of Abraham, might have served to give some knowledge of the Israelitish faith;—a knowledge which, afterwards, near neighbourhood, friendly communication, and alliances even in despite of the divine command, would tend to maintain and extend.

In these respects the Phœnicians and the Egyptians appear to have had peculiar means of access to the storehouse of religious

truth. On the other hand, it is notorious that, in spite of the abominations of their public worship, they were the principal agents in propagating sacred philosophy among the other nations. In the case of the former people, this was principally done by means of their maritime and commercial habits, which led them to visit foreign regions, and in not a few to plant their colonies. And it surely is reasonable to suppose that, wherever they settled themselves, or established a regular intercourse, their occult doctrines, as well as their popular superstitions, would become known. The latter country, by its early civilization and advance in political science, acquired a high reputation for intellectual superiority. In the times, of which we are speaking, foreign travel supplied in great measure the present place of books; and he, who wished to augment his stores of wisdom, visited those countries, where it was supposed most to abound. Accordingly, while [c] Phœnicia by her migrations scattered abroad the seeds

[c] Gale b. 1. p. 49.

of knowledge, Egypt, whose habits were more stationary, saw the aspirants after wisdom flock to her shores, to consult her learned priesthood, and thence export science, to instruct and enlighten their own ruder countrymen.

It is through the illustrious disciples of those countries, the Greeks, that we become acquainted with these circumstances. But, although the scholars have eclipsed their masters in renown, still they [d] neither were, nor hardly pretended to be, otherwise than scholars. Those who [e] first imported science and philosophy into Greece, as Cadmus, Pythagoras, Thales, and others, were either of Phœnician origin, or had received their education in that country. And, even in times of more advanced knowledge, such persons as desired to improve themselves, or aspired to the office of instructing others, deemed it requisite to travel into foreign countries, more especially into Egypt, to imbibe information. It is not necessary to go down lower than Plato. That he was

[d] Timæus Plato, v. 3. p. 22.

[e] Vossius de Philosophorum Sectis, c. 1. sec. 25. &c.

deeply indebted to Phœnician and Egyptian lore is generally admitted; and, after his days, the fashionable philosophers, wiser in their own conceits, ventured more upon original speculations, and, in their eager desire to found schools, and to be the authors of some new system, entangled themselves in the labyrinth of their own vain imaginations, and wandered into the dark mazes of materialism and atheism. Neither, in the anterior period of which I have now taken a rapid survey, would I by any means insist on the purity and perfection of the religious knowledge, which I suppose to have been possessed by some of the philosophers. It might have been, and it unquestionably was, mixed with much alloy, much adulteration. But that it was considerably elevated above the coarse apprehensions of the idolatrous vulgar, cannot, I think, be reasonably doubted. And, if we will pursue backwards the steps by which this knowledge was acquired, we can hardly fail to perceive traces of the provident care of the Almighty to establish means, by which some portion of the pure doctrines

communicated to the Jews might extend beyond the boundaries of the holy land, and might visit and enlighten other countries.

But it was not merely of the labours and researches of individuals, athirst after knowledge, that God availed himself, in order to keep alive some faint spark of religious knowledge, and so to make preparation for *the brightness of the coming of the Messiah.* Even in early times, the miraculous protection afforded by the Almighty to his favoured people, must have tended to make his name known and feared among the hostile nations. And of the manner in which the relations of peace and war with the Israelities served to promote the worship of Jehovah, we may mention one very interesting instance in the case of the captive maid, who induced the Syrian Naaman to pay that visit to Elisha, which produced his cure and his conversion [f]. But to look at the matter in a broader view, though as succinctly as possible; from the time when governments began to assume a more deter-

[f] 2 Kings v.

minate shape; when distant conquests were achieved, and, as a necessary consequence, a communication between remote countries was opened; from this time we believe that the course of the leading events of the world, the rise and fall of empires, were moulded by the Almighty with a view to assist and forward the great cause of revelation. I will not, indeed, dwell at any length on the well known subject of the four great monarchies, which have engaged the attention of historians sacred and profane, as having influenced in succession and in various degrees the destiny of the world. To our purpose it may be sufficient to observe, not only that the chosen people were brought successively into contact with those empires, but that the geographical position of the land, wherein they were seated, seems to have been selected with an express view to give facility to that intercourse.

[g] Civilization, government, and empire, we know took their rise in those genial climates and in those fertile regions, where man was

[g] See Miller's Philos. of Mod. Hist. Lec. 3.

relieved from the necessity of maintaining a severe struggle with nature to obtain the necessaries of life, and where his powers and faculties were capable of an early expansion. These were the countries situated near the original birthplace of mankind, contiguous to those mighty streams, which formed in early times the boundaries of the known and unknown world, the Euphrates and the Tigris. And here, speaking in a general way as to local situation, and without reference to partial changes within that empire, or to migrations of the seat of government, here, we may say, was placed the first great empire of the world, which, considered as one [h], has been termed indifferently Assyrian or Babylonian. But, although it seems to be a law, that it is only in a highly genial region that civilization shall first strike root, it no less requires a soil and a climate of different properties to be reared and to mature its fruit. Under the first empire, we hear accounts of works undoubtedly denoting the hand of those,

[h] Newton, vol. i. p. 234.

who could command to a vast extent the physical strength of their fellow-creatures. But of their performances in such arts, as form the true triumph of man, by indicating high intellectual powers, we possess little trace. Neither was the character of the second empire, when divested of romance, materially different. But the Persian empire gradually extended itself to the shores of the Mediterranean, to those regions, where man appears to have been placed by nature under circumstances the most favourable to improvement, where the difficulties of his situation were enough to arouse, without distressing him, and where patience and industry, although they would be crowned with success, were still indispensably requisite. It was into such regions that empire passed, and, as it successively visited the Grecian and Roman states, it exalted nations, which will not only excite the admiration, but which will influence the modes of thinking and the principles of conduct of the most remote posterity. But, in this migration of empire, we may observe that Judæa was so situated, that it

was never very far remote from that state which bore the sovereignty; and, this door of communication with the reigning power being opened, we believe that the course of events was so controlled and disposed by an overruling Providence, that the Jewish people should bear a part in the national occurrences, and, although in the character of subjects and tributaries, should give some instructions in religious science to their masters.

We may also notice that the sort of instruction, which the Jews were enabled to give, had always a close reference and adaptation to the state of society and to the capacity of the ruling people to be taught.

At the zenith of the power of the Babylonians, we find the Jews, in punishment for their idolatrous propensities, removed from their native seat, and captives in a foreign land. On them the punishment had produced the desired effects, and they were then devoted to the worship of their God, from which they never afterwards swerved. In this state, they were suitable instruments to give a lesson respecting the vanity of ido-

latry to a people, who, although incapable of abstract reasonings, or of studious inquiry, were yet ready to receive impressions from any striking exhibition of miraculous agency. Accordingly, some young captives of the Jewish nation, and one especially, Daniel, who was destined to bear a conspicuous part through several successive reigns, had recommended themselves to the monarch by their virtue and wisdom [i]. In this state of things, when three of their number had an opportunity of illustrating their faith by [j] a refusal to comply with an impious command to pay divine honours to a mortal, God interfered in a miraculous manner to rescue them from punishment, and by this interference gave so signal a testimony of his power, that it extorted from the powerful monarch of Babylon, first, an act [k] of forbearance toward the worshippers of the God of Israel, and, afterwards, on a special display of the wisdom and prescience of Daniel, an acknowledgment of that God as the king of heaven [l]. This act,

[i] Dan. i. 19, &c. [j] Dan. iii. [k] Dan. iii. 29. [l] Dan. iv. 37.

coupled with the advancement of the Jews to dignity and high office, must, we may readily conceive, have had a considerable effect in making known, among the people and nations subject to the Babylonian sceptre, the name of the great Jehovah; a knowledge, which could not fail to be augmented and propagated, when, on a revolution of the empire, and the accession of another dignity, the new sovereign found the same Daniel, eminent in station as venerable in years, just signalized by a recent proof of prophetic knowledge in favour of the conquering people [m]. To Daniel the consequence was a continuance, and even an accession of honour [n]; which was obscured only to break out with additional lustre when his steady refusal to disobey the laws of his God obtained from that God another proof of his power to turn all the rage of his enemies to his own glory. Of this signal miracle the effect was, that the cause and the religion of the Jews found such favour with the Persian monarchs, that the

[m] Dan. v. 13, &c. [n] Dan. vi.

people were restored to their native country, and, by this restoration, an accomplishment was given to the various prophecies which had foretold their return after a definite period of years. Still the ten tribes were never permitted to revisit their native seats; and even of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin many were unwilling to abandon their new settlements. These Israelites, scattered among the nations, must have served to give a considerable notoriety both to the present tenets and to the future hopes of their people. [o] *In the land of my captivity*, an Israelitish captive had once exclaimed, *I will praise him, and declare his might and majesty to a sinful nation.* And to such praises, and to such declarations, uttered by the Israelites both of the captivity and of the dispersion, it seems most probable that we may ascribe the singular circumstance, that the expectation of the Messiah so much prevailed in the east, that a [p] new star was exhibited in the firmament of heaven to announce his birth to sages of that country.

[o] Tobit xiii. 6. [p] Matt. ii. 1, &c.

During the earlier part of the time now under review, the means, which God appears to have adopted in order to recommend his people, and to signalize their religious belief in the eyes of their conquerors, were, principally, direct interposition, and a visible display of miraculous power; a process the most suitable to produce the desired effect upon minds of a less intellectual stamp. But in the Grecian empire, and in the governments into which it was split after the death of Alexander, a very different spirit, the spirit of literature and refinement, prevailed. And, as the Jewish people kept pace with the altered condition of human society, as they began to imbibe the tastes and to adopt the modes of the neighbouring people, so the treatment which they experienced from God assumed a new character. We no longer hear of miracles displayed to overawe and compel the belief of minds capable of understanding and appreciating more refined arguments. But there is no ground to believe that either the Jews or their neighbours were losers by the change. During the latter periods of the Jewish history not a trace

of apostasy from their God appears. But, engaged in commerce and in the arts, they spread themselves over the regions of civilization, and whithersoever they went, carrying with them their peculiar creed, they gave it extensive circulation and celebrity. In Egypt particularly they enjoyed especial favour and protection; and there excited in the mind of an enlightened and liberal prince so great a desire to obtain a knowledge of their sacred writings, that a translation of them into Greek, the celebrated version of the Septuagint, was commanded to be made; while, in the recent application of[q] the papyrus reed to the purposes of

[q] Prideaux, vol. ii. p. 706, &c. Taylor's Scheme of Scrip. Div. p. 171.

Robertson makes a similar observation respecting paper. "In the eleventh century the art of making paper in the manner now become universal was invented; by means of that, not only the number of manuscripts increased, but the study of the sciences was wonderfully facilitated. The invention of the art of making paper, and the invention of the art of printing, are two considerable events in literary history. It is remarked that the former preceded the first dawning of letters and improvement in knowledge, toward the close of the eleventh century; the latter ushered in the light which spread over Europe at the era of the Reformation." *Robertson's Works*, vol. iv .p. 282.

writing, we perceive a circumstance so auspicious to the cause of literature in general, and especially to the diffusion of the scriptures, that we are tempted to believe it was one of the providential arrangements of God to promote his designs in regard to religion. Thus capable of an easier dissemination, and thus exhibited in a language not only the most rich and beautiful, but the common vehicle for communication throughout the civilized world, the holy scriptures might become better known, particularly among the learned, some of whom could hardly fail to have been struck with their manifest superiority in doctrine and worship to any other known system of religion.

As the Grecian empire had been materially instrumental to the cause of divine truth, by bringing into general use a language, into which the old scriptures were translated, and in which the New Testament was destined to be primarily written; so the Roman, the last and most important of the four great empires, was conducive to the same purpose, by conquering, and by

bringing under one general system, the greater part of the known world. By these means, an easy communication was opened between the most remote regions, and a voice, which might before have been confined to the spot where it was uttered, was made readily to be heard from the Euphrates to the Iberus. How widely the Jewish faith had thus been enabled to spread itself, and how numerous were the proselytes to their religion, we may collect, not only from the notices of pagan writers, but from the record of the various countries which sent worshippers to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles; and also from the number of synagogues found in various cities, to which the apostles directed their steps. And when the time for the manifestation of the Messiah drew nigh, the very circumstances, in which the Roman empire was placed, became, not we believe without the special direction of Providence, peculiarly auspicious for the great purposes of his mission. For one of the very few times since the foundation of the city, the tem-

ple of Janus was closed. Throughout the wide regions that acknowledged the Roman sway, universal peace prevailed; a circumstance not only suitable to the character and pretensions of Him, who was styled the *Prince of peace*, but also favourable to the propagation of the faith, which he came to promulgate. As an instance also of the advantage derived to the cause of revelation from the connection of Judæa with a regularly constituted government, we may mention that the enrolment ordered to be made by the supreme authority at the birth of our Saviour, served to authenticate his lineage and family. And, at the closing part of his ministry, during those scenes which it was peculiarly important to have properly attested and made known, a Roman governor was resident on the spot, and bore personally a large share in the transactions; as if with the express design that *the thing should not be done in a corner*, nor by persons so obscure, that it could be said, either at the time or in subsequent ages, that their supposed acts were incapable either of contradiction or of verification.

This survey, as it has designed to embrace so wide a field, has necessarily been extremely scanty. It has been my desire to make it appear that even the Gentile world has borne testimony to the original revelation, and to the care of God in preparing the way for the incarnation of the promised Redeemer. I have endeavoured to shew that some vestiges of the primitive faith long lingered in the world; that even various systems of idolatry exhibited traces of the doctrines originally revealed, and of the personages and incidents recorded in the sacred volume; and especially, that the prevalence of the rite of animal sacrifice indicated, that even the future victim, of which the slain animal was designed to be the type, was not lost out of sight. I have also endeavoured to shew, that when darkness, thick darkness, had gathered round the nations, the divine illumination, vouchsafed to the Jewish people, came in aid of the dawning light of reason, to enable some minds of keener glance to see in part the error of their way; and, lastly, that in the successive exaltation of the great empires of the world,

the course of events was so regulated, as either directly to communicate divine truth, or, by an indirect operation, to prepare the way for its farther diffusion.

In the mean while, it should ever be remembered, that the little state of Judæa was placed as it were a fixed and central luminary of religious knowledge, to which the other nations successively presented their darker sides. It was the glory of other states to excel in science, in arts, or in arms. In particular, the two last of the great empires have deeply stamped their memorials upon all future times. In poetry, in music, in painting, in sculpture, in architecture, in oratory, in history, in criticism, in every art that gives embellishment and grace to human society, Greece has been, and will ever continue, the acknowledged standard of excellence, the example and mistress of all succeeding times. A like distinction may be claimed for Rome, for its skill in the science of government, for its system of military discipline, for those institutions that impart a bold and

vigorous tone to the mind of man. And great, unquestionably, are the obligations that we owe to each of those celebrated states. But there is something more valuable than literature and the fine arts; something more important than even the power of conquering a world. This is the science that teaches us to know God, and how to obtain his favour. And whither shall we go to find the people with whom this science has been deposited? It is not to those, who for their deeds in arts or arms have won the applauses of poets, orators, and historians. We must go to the Jews, the natives of a poor region, the derision and contempt of other nations. Yet there has been preserved that knowledge of God, which has been nearly lost in the rest of the world; and thither, if they would renew their knowledge, must the proud sons of science and of philosophy, of policy and of war, resort. This surely must be the hand of God. In perfect analogy with the dispensation to which these arrangements were introductory, and for which all things

were now ready, God from the beginning *chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty: —that no flesh should glory in his presence.*[r]

[r] 1 Cor. i. 27. 29.

LECTURE V.

HEBREWS i. 1, 2.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets,

Hath in these last times spoken unto us by his Son.

THUS far our inquiries have led us to review the course of divine revelation preliminary and preparatory to the personal advent of the great Redeemer. We have seen that the primeval revelation had taught the rudiments and fundamental principles of all religion. We have seen that, when this religious knowledge was corrupted, and in danger of being altogether lost, the dispensation given to the descendants of Abraham preserved the true faith among one people on the earth, and even had an indirect influence on the Gentile nations, conducive, in many respects, toward promoting the ulterior purposes of

the Almighty. And, at length, after the lapse of many ages, various circumstances manifestly concurred to afford a favourable season for a fuller developement of the great counsel of God.

On the one side, the need of some farther revelation was now plainly demonstrated. A fair and ample time had been given to prove what man could do in the way of knowing God, either by his own unassisted powers, or by such aid from heaven as he had hitherto received. And the result of the experiment was this. Throughout the Gentile world the great mass of mankind was sunk in a base and degrading superstition. Toward rescuing the people from this state no attempt had been made, no thought of such an attempt had been conceived. Neither had any of those master spirits, who, in every age of the world, are in advance before their own times, been able to perceive divine truth with any steadiness or certainty. Still, on the other hand, the advance, which the human mind had now made, indicated that the world was become more capable of receiving clearer

and fuller information on divine things, if duly imparted. In several countries, literature, science, and philosophy had been successfully cultivated. Some gifted individuals had struggled against the superstitious absurdities, which they saw around them. They had their speculations respecting the nature of God; respecting their own origin, the ends of their being and their future destination. And, if there should now appear one, who could confirm their surmises, and could farther add much original information on divine subjects; one, who moreover could speak on such matters with the authority of a teacher sent from heaven; such a messenger might indeed be misused and persecuted by those, with whom he came into immediate contact; but he would utter a voice, which the world was not unprepared to hear, and which no human efforts could by any possibility put eventually to silence.

So, too, ethical science had now been advanced. The mind of man had occupied itself in large speculations concerning the foundation of morals, concerning the best

rules for the regulation of human life, concerning what contributes the most to individual, to national, and to general good. And, although many of these speculations were imperfect, still a purer and more sublimated code of moral instruction, which, in a less intellectual period of the world, would have been unintelligible, would have been little better than *pearls cast before swine*, might now be propounded with a reasonable probability of being understood and justly valued.

And, as the human mind appeared thus ripe for the reception of a higher system of religious and moral instruction, so the external condition of the world was favourable for the promulgation of such a dispensation. An age of high cultivation, as it was capable of inquiring into the pretensions of one professing to come from God, would preclude the suspicion of forgery or deception. And the peculiar circumstance of the union of a very considerable portion of the world under one government tended both to promote the civilization, requisite for the reception of a spi-

ritual religion, and also to give facility for the wide diffusion of a dispensation, which was destined, in its early stage, to be confined within no narrow limits, and, ultimately, to occupy the whole earth.

At length, things being thus prepared, Jesus Christ, the promised seed of the woman, the end and object of the preliminary dispensations, the subject of so many prophecies, the antitype of so many types, the substance of so many shadows, came into the world. He lived, he taught, he died. In him was accomplished all that the fathers had *seen as through a glass darkly;* and in him the great scheme of human salvation had (so far as this world is concerned) its consummation and crown.

The great end, for which Jesus Christ came into the world, was, it should ever be borne in mind, to die for the redemption of man. In this purpose and destination it is implied that man was unable to save his own soul; that, if he should be saved, it must be done by some vicarious satisfaction offered to the justice of God; that such vicarious satisfaction could be offered by none

other than by a divine personage, and by him only by his death. So at least it appears to us. It is indeed proper for us to use great caution in saying what might or might not have been done by God. But each of the foregoing considerations, which point ultimately to the *death* of the divine Redeemer, seems to approve itself to our understanding.

It is sufficiently obvious, that man, the inheritor of an original and constitutional taint of sin, and continually aggravating his guilt by personal transgressions, was unable of himself to merit the vast and transcendent rewards of everlasting life. It appears also that the dignity of God required that his laws should not be violated with impunity, that his justice demanded some satisfaction to be made for guilt, and that the character of his moral government made it proper that every transgression should *receive a just recompense of reward.* If then man should be the object of mercy and pardon, yet not without an expiation for his sins, it should seem that the process must be, that some other person should

take those sins upon himself, and undergo the punishment which they deserved. But it is plain that the person, who should act this part, must himself be so free from personal offences, as to have nothing of his own whereon to require pardon and atonement; he must be of sufficient dignity to make his voluntary sacrifice of himself an adequate satisfaction for the sins of mankind; and, at the same time, be so ardent in his charity, as to be willing to subject himself spontaneously to punishment for the redemption of others. It is clear that no created being, not even the highest of the angelic orders, came within the description of the requisite qualifications. But, in the Son of God, the holiness and dignity to fit him for the office, and the charity to be willing to undertake it, were combined. Accordingly, the *death* of the Saviour was announced throughout the whole course of the preparatory revelations. At the very beginning it was intimated that the deliverer, before he should achieve the victory, must submit to temporary defeat and pain. The animal, which from the first was de-

signed to represent him, was slain as a victim on the altar. The great patriarch was taught to foresee a figure of the sacrifice of the Messiah in the intended and accepted sacrifice of his only son. When the religious polity of the Jews assumed a regular form, the scape-goat, the sacrifice of the high priest, and numerous other rites, foreshewed, and were most probably understood to foreshew, the future oblation of the Lamb of God. When, in process of time, the prophetic spirit was more abundantly shed abroad, it spoke of the sufferings and the death of the Messiah with greater and greater distinctness. And at length the prophecies were accomplished, the types were filled up, the shadows were turned into reality. Jesus Christ expired upon the cross. By his death he "made a full, "perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and "satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." The sentence of condemnation was reversed; and man was restored to the capacity of being received into favour with God, and of enjoying eternal life.

And this benefit, it should be observed,

extended to the whole race of man without limitation or restriction. The benefit was not, indeed, irrespective. It was suspended on the performance of certain terms, viz. on faith in Christ, repentance for past sins, and a sincere desire and earnest endeavour to conform to the will of God. But whoever fulfilled these requisite conditions placed himself within the range of salvation. There was no partial decrees by which it was offered to some, and denied to others. The original promise, as it was given when the human race consisted but of a single pair, could have had no respect to persons; and Adam, to whom it was pronounced, might be considered as the federal head and representative of the whole race of man, with respect both to the penalty which had been incurred, and to the grace of which he received the intimation. And, as the original promise extended to all mankind, so, neither in the blessing announced to Abraham, neither in the typical representations under the law, neither in the prophetic intimations, nor, finally, in the actual consummation and

completion of the Atonement, was there any thing that curtailed or circumscribed the universality of its efficacy.

Thus to die, to die for the sins of the whole world, to pay the debt due to divine justice, and to open the door of reconciliation between God and man, this was the great end and object for which Christ came into the world. To this point all the preceding revelations converged; and from this point a new order of things, a new system, was to commence. But Christ, before he submitted to death, lived on earth many years. He conversed freely with man. He delivered instructions in familiar intercourse as occasion arose, as well as in more set discourses. When God walked on earth, and opened to mankind his stores of heavenly wisdom, we can hardly suppose that no important discoveries should be imparted; that no advance should be made in the course of progressive instruction, through which the human race was designed to pass. Accordingly, to man, now about to be reconciled with God, much additional information respecting the divine nature and

counsels was disclosed; to man, now about to be put in a capacity to render a fuller obedience to the laws of God, those laws were enlarged, and were propounded with new sanctions.

The religious and moral instructions communicated by Jesus Christ may be ranged under three principal heads; a farther knowledge respecting God, respecting a future state, respecting the moral duties of man on earth.

I. The first discoveries respected the nature of God, I mean principally his existence in three Persons united, yet distinct; and they more especially respected the attributes and operations of the second and third Persons of the Holy Trinity.

God, the Father, was most fully and explicitly known and worshipped by the Jews. In spite of all their lapses into idolatry, in spite of their strong tendency, especially during the earlier and darker periods of their history, to associate false deities with the supreme Jehovah, still, from the time when God declared himself to Moses, to the days of the Messiah, the Jews

may be said to have known him, as one, as all-powerful, the creator of the universe, the governor of the world by his providence, the rewarder and punisher of man according to the nature of his deeds, and the object to be adored by a spiritual worship. The knowledge, and, on a view of the whole subject, we certainly may add, the practice of the Jews, in this great and fundamental question of theology, is the point, where they stand in most decided and in most honourable contrast to all the other nations of the earth, without exception of those, which were the most polished, learned, and wise.

Neither can it be denied that the Jews possessed some knowledge of a plurality of Persons in the Godhead [a], and that the character and offices of the Son and of the Holy Ghost were disclosed to them not altogether for the first time by Jesus of Nazareth. Still, it is probable, their knowledge on that head was but indistinct and imperfect. They might have known the

[a] Allix's Judgment of the Ancient Jewish Church, particularly ch. 9, 10.

divine Word who created the world, and who, as the Angel of the covenant, had spoken to Moses, had conducted the people through the wilderness, had appeared in the divine Schechinah, and throughout their whole history had been their organ of communication with the Almighty Father. So also they might have known the Holy Spirit, who moved upon the face of the waters, who rested on the seventy elders [b], and who spake by David [c] and the prophets. But, to borrow the expression of a learned prelate of the present day [d], "the Jews were but "unskilful metaphysicians;" and they might have known the Word and the Spirit, they might have known them as invested with powers and perfections, which properly are attributable only to God; and yet might not have regarded them as essential parts of the supreme divinity, in the full, clear, and determinate manner, in which we, who

[b] Num. xi. 25, 26.

[c] 2 Sam. xxiii. 2.

[d] Dissertation upon the traditional Knowledge of a Promised Redeemer, p. 97. by Dr. Blomfield, now Bishop of Chester.

have been instructed by the Gospel, have been taught to view them. When I say a full, clear, and determinate manner, of course I do not mean that we, more than the Jews, understand how the mysterious union of the three Persons subsists; nor, if we were repeatedly visited by messengers from heaven, unless they at the same time furnished us with new and more powerful faculties, could we, it is probable, ever be made to understand it. But a thing may be distinctly known, while its modes and circumstances remain in obscurity. And this is the sort of knowledge on the subject of the Trinity, which has been communicated to us by the Gospel of Christ. Not only was the doctrine revived and brought to recollection, but it was placed in a clearer, stronger, and steadier light. We are taught to know, and consequently are required to confess and to worship, not only the Father, but the Word and the Spirit, each in his supreme and absolute divinity. And when, having been thus made acquainted with all the Persons of the Holy Trinity, we are farther taught the part and office, which they

severally bear in the work of human salvation; when we learn that the one has died, and is now employed in making intercession for us, and that the other is ever at hand to renew our heart, and to support us with continual supplies of grace; what a flood of new ideas, respecting ourselves, and our situation in regard to God, is poured into the mind; ideas, that serve at once to mortify and to encourage, to humble and to exalt us! Together also with these opposite, and (in their combination) quite new ideas, what new sentiments, what new motives of action, arise within us! Seeing, on the one side, the fearful nature of sin, which could be expiated by nothing less than the blood of the divine Word, and, on the other side, the value of the human soul, for whose sake that precious blood was shed; seeing, too, our unworthiness, which cannot effect our own salvation, but, at the same time, the presence of a divine power, ready at hand to give success and efficacy to our weak endeavours; seeing these things, we learn to cultivate that character compounded of humility and of confidence, of self-abase-

ment and of the sublimest aspirations, which appears to conduct man to the utmost perfection of his nature; which enables him to do all things, yet to pride himself on nothing. And with respect to our feelings towards God, as his justice and mercy are reconciled to our eyes; as we see him remitting no portion of the penalty due to sin, yet extending his mercy to sinners; permitting no merit to reside in our works, yet accepting them for the sake and through the mediation of his well-beloved Son; we learn at once to fear and to love him, to view him with the awe due to the inflexible Judge, and with the affection inseparable to the merciful Father.

II. The next discovery made by the gospel respects the immortality of the soul, and a future judgment. This, still less than the last article, can be considered as a point disclosed absolutely for the first time to the world. Unquestionably, it formed one main article of the primitive code of religious knowledge revealed to the first progenitors of mankind, and thence communicated to succeeding generations. Instead

of being contradicted, it was confirmed by the views that were disclosed in consequence of the fall; since, if man was to be restored to his former glory, it must be, not in this world, where he palpably was fallen and degraded, but in another stage of existence. This knowledge must have been possessed by the race of faithful worshippers, and especially by Abraham and his family, since we know they were taught to look to a heavenly home and abode. That it was not directly taught by Moses, is no proof that the Jews did not possess it; since the revelations, of which he was the organ, regarded other matters, and it appears, by incidental notices of scripture, that the Israelites believed in a future state. Neither, in considering the case of the rest of the world, need we go farther than the known studies of our youth, to convince ourselves that the ideas of a future retribution, of a Tartarus and of an Elysium, were familiar to the Gentile nations. Still, throughout the whole range of the world, the impression respecting a future state, which had been stamped on the mind of man by

the original revelation, was weakened, and much defaced. Sometimes it was a matter of speculation and surmise, a matter to be desired by the wise and good, but full of uncertainty. Where it was admitted with greater confidence, it was obscured with fables, often of a pernicious tendency, since they gave the rewards of an after-life to the workers of various iniquities. In other cases, it was connected with foolish, and sometimes not very innocent, notions respecting the preexistence and the transmigration of souls. And, if ever it were taught in purity, it was done under the veil of mysterious rites, and with the sanctions of inviolable secrecy. May we not then say, that when Jesus Christ taught the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and its necessary consequence, a future judgment, he taught a doctrine in many respects new? It was new in the certainty and the authority, with which it was declared, since he did not speak of it as a thing ardently to be desired and probably to be expected, but as certain, as announced upon the veracity of one, who bore the divine commission, and

farther vouched and demonstrated by his own resurrection and return to life. It was new, as speaking determinately respecting the eternal duration of the life to come, in which there should be no return to the earth after the revolution of a certain period of time, no passage into other receptacles of the human soul, whether of a higher or a lower nature. It was new, in describing the future joys of the good, as being of a pure and spiritualized nature, such indeed as could not be adequately conceived by man in the present state of his faculties, and capable of being represented only by negative qualities, as consisting of none of the pleasures or occupations, which now engage our attention. Above all, it was new in the sort of connection which it established between the present and the future order of things[e]. Other teachers represented the future world as in a manner subservient and ancillary to the present. They seemed to teach, that, if men culti-

[e] See Soame Jenyns, Internal Evidence of Christian Religion, Propos. II.

vated the qualities that were reputable and useful on earth, they might be rewarded with happiness after death. They seemed to regard principally the good of this world, and to think that, in order to promote that good, the Deity had annexed certain rewards to the performance of certain actions in this life. But Jesus Christ has taught us to regard the future life in a different manner. He represents the next world as every thing, the present as nothing, except in the relation it bears to the next. This life, according to the spirit of his instructions, is no more than a vestibule, through which we must pass in order to reach our certain abode; it is a probationary scene, where we must exercise and discipline ourselves for our future state of existence, and where we must cultivate those dispositions and acquire those habits, which alone can qualify us to partake of the glory that shall be revealed. This distinction is important. According to the former view of things, the external act was all. As long as a man performed certain actions, let his inward heart and disposition have been what they might,

he was entitled to the reward annexed by the supreme lawgiver to those performances. But, under the Christian system, which represents our future destiny as the natural and inevitable result of the state of mind that we carry with us out of this world, it becomes necessary to set the disposition aright. We must not only perform certain acts of virtue, but, if we would enjoy the society of the good, we must love virtue. We must not only obey the divine commands, but, if we would live in the presence of God, we must be spiritually and heavenly minded. If our hearts are impure, and our dispositions perverse, we are unfit to be inhabitants of the city and paradise of God, and should feel ourselves out of our proper station, if any inversion of the divine laws should chance to place us there.

III. The third and last discovery made by the gospel respected the nature of our moral duties on earth. In speaking of the peculiar disposition and frame of mind, which seemed to result from the new views respecting the nature of God and the life to come presented by Christ, we indeed have,

to a considerable degree, anticipated this head; since such a disposition and frame of mind can hardly fail to produce a course of action essentially different from that, whose source and origin were different. It may not, however, be superfluous to state a few of the principal points, in which Jesus Christ has given a new cast and character to human virtue. And in general it may be said, that the novelty did not consist so much in originating and discovering any virtue before unknown, as in assigning a new value and importance to certain virtues, in drawing them out of the shade, and placing them in a more prominent situation and conspicuous light. This is peculiarly the case with respect to all the family of the quiet, calm, unobtrusive virtues, which had hitherto attracted little regard or favour with men, but which with Jesus Christ were held in the highest estimation. The character of pagan virtue was, for the most part, bold and forward, loving to exhibit itself in the great theatre of public life, and seeking all its applause and reward from men: while that, which shunned observation,

and sought only to recommend itself to him *who seeth in secret*, was little known, or, if known, would have been little regarded. In other cases, the novelty of the Christian morality consisted in giving a greater expansion to virtues before known and recognised. This applies particularly to the graces of purity and charity. We know that heathen morality gave a considerable range to the licentious passions; while it was the peculiarity of the Christian doctrine, not merely to introduce a greater strictness of conduct, by forbidding every impure act, but to cut off the source of the evil, by regulating the heart and by checking every thought that would lead to deeds of uncleanness. And, with respect to the love of our fellow-creatures, it is notorious that Jesus Christ gave it a fresh energy, by teaching it to glow with additional warmth toward our friends, and by directing it toward strangers, and even enemies. Above all, he gave it a strength and consistency before unknown, when he laid down that best and most comprehensive rule of action, deservedly called the golden rule, *the royal*

law[f], that, which makes our self-love the measure of our conduct toward others; that, which bids us, *All things whatsoever we would that men should do to us, to do even so to them*[g]. These three, humility, purity, and charity, are virtues peculiarly Christian; and, taken as heads and representatives of their respective classes, they may be said to go far toward filling up the three great divisions of human duty, that toward God, that toward ourselves, that toward our neighbour. It cannot indeed be said that they were unknown before the preaching of our Saviour. But certainly by him they have been so brought forward, so illustrated, as to have assumed a new importance, and to have become the leading and most prominent figures in the group of the moral graces. They have been so strengthened and enforced, that they may now be justly considered the three grand pillars, on which the structure of Christian morality mainly rests.

To this statement of the discoveries

[f] James ii. 8. [g] Matt. vii. 12.

made by Jesus Christ, a few general observations respecting the gospel dispensation may be added.

1. In order to guide our steps in the new course of virtue thus prescribed to us, we are furnished with the perfect example of the great author of our faith. If Jesus Christ recommended active benevolence, he went about doing good; if he preached forgiveness of injuries, he prayed for his murderers; if he inculcated self-denial, he voluntarily subjected himself to penury, crosses, persecution, and death; if he prescribed piety toward God, he passed days and nights in prayer; if he enjoined resignation to the divine will, he freely drank the cup which his Father gave to his lips. In these respects it scarcely becomes us to observe, that our Lord presented a marked contrast to the example, often pernicious, always imperfect, of other teachers; since there is almost impiety in supposing the bare possibility that he could have infringed his own laws. But we may remark, that by thus practising and exemplifying them, he has rendered no small service to the

great cause of virtue, since, in addition to his instructions, he has exhibited, and, as it were, embodied a living pattern of that new cast and description of character, of those original and distinctive excellencies, which he has prescribed to his followers.

2. We next may notice the new description of persons, to whom our blessed Lord addressed his instructions. That *the poor had the gospel preached unto them* [h], he himself adduced as a characteristic mark and a decisive testimony of his divine commission. A portion of mankind, which, although by far the most numerous, had not yet attracted the regard of any moral teacher, were now taught, that, as they were endowed with immortal souls, they were precious in the eyes of God; and that, if they fulfilled the duties of their allotted station, they might be admitted into future glory, not less than the mightiest monarchs that swayed the sceptre of the universe.

3. Farther; as our Lord addressed himself to the poor, so he himself appeared in

[h] Matt. xi. 5.

the world in lowly circumstances. Born in a humble station of life, he never emerged, nor attempted to emerge, from it. Placing himself in a situation which precluded the use of violence, he addressed himself to the reason of mankind, and required them to receive him as the expected Redeemer, the great teacher promised by God, because he fulfilled every prediction which the prophets had uttered respecting that exalted personage, because he did such works, as only one commissioned from Heaven could perform.

4. Resolved still to shew that his religion, if it succeeded, should not be indebted for its success to human power, or to human ingenuity, he chose for his immediate followers and first agents in propagating his doctrines, men, like himself, of lowly origin, poor and unlearned; men, who of themselves never could have conceived the thought of changing the religion and condition of the world, and still less could have effected such an enterprise, unless God had been with them by *signs and wonders and mighty works*. And, when those

especial manifestations of divine power ceased; when, as the gospel had taken root, it no longer required a miraculous interposition to nurture and protect it; the regular and ordinary means, by which it might be brought to maturity, were few and simple.

These were, first, the influences of the Holy Spirit, no longer exhibiting themselves in a miraculous manner, yet ever present, ever operative, drawing all men, yet compelling none, to embrace and to obey the truth.

Next, as more visible and palpable instruments, though indebted for their efficacy to the secret co-operation of the same divine Spirit, our Lord has provided us with the scriptures of the new covenant, with the two sacraments instituted by himself, and with a ministry, with whom he has promised *to be alway, even unto the end of the world*[i]; provisions of the greatest potency to those who are disposed to use them aright, yet none of them of such over-

[i] Matt. xxviii. 20.

powering ascendency, of such irresistible sway, as to exact from man more than a free, a willing, *a reasonable service.* In the Gospels and the other apostolical writings, we possess perpetual oracles of divine truth, capable of being transfused into every language, and of speaking the words of salvation to all nations. By the shape in which they are cast, they are happily adapted to bring before men the history and the substance of the religion propounded for their acceptance. They, moreover, are so grave, yet simple, in their composition, so important in their matter, so attractive in the characters which they delineate, so suitable in their precepts and doctrines to the wants of man, that they are calculated to produce the strongest effect, and to become the most powerful agents in propagating the Christian faith. By the sacraments we are furnished with plain and easy means, first of admission into the Christian covenant, and afterwards of a perpetual supply of grace to renew and sanctify our nature. The Christian priesthood, in distinct gradations and separate departments,

have been charged with the office of proclaiming and dispensing the words of divine truth, of administering the sacraments, which our Lord ordained, of exercising a pastoral care over their committed charges, in the way of admonition, exhortation, and instruction. Of every work of beneficence and love it is their peculiar office to be the perpetual remembrancers and the active agents. In a word, as their divine master engaged ever to accompany, ever to support them, it becomes their part (with reverence be it spoken) to supply, as far as comes within the capacity of weak mortals, the absence of Him, who, during his whole abode on earth, went about doing good to the souls and to the bodies of men.

From the whole of the foregoing survey it now only remains to deduce a few short inferences.

1. It immediately strikes us, that the Christian dispensation is fitted for universal reception, and may be embraced by all people and nations and languages. In its rites and institutions there appears nothing that savours of locality; nothing that may

not be adopted with equal propriety by every region of the earth; nothing that should obstruct the completion of the prophecy, which declares, that *the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it*[k].

2. Next, as little can we fail to perceive, that Christianity is adapted to the matured, and, if I may so say, the adult state of human reason. It does not by a continued exhibition of miraculous agency force belief, as *on children in understanding*, incapable of weighing moral evidence; nor does it impress its truth on the mind with the strength of irresistible demonstration. It requires to be investigated and examined. Such an inquiry is, indeed, likely to end in conviction, a conviction the more satisfactory and the more calculated to influence the practice, because it is unconstrained. But the inquiry cannot be properly conducted without some knowledge

[k] Isaiah ii. 2. Micah iv. 1.

of past and present history, some philosophical insight into the moral and intellectual condition of man. And as such is the character of the evidences on which Christianity rests, it is also clear, that its doctrines, its motives, its sanctions, its precepts, are the most fitly propounded to man with his mental powers strengthened by exercise, and expanded by knowledge and extensive observation. We can conceive that some of its revelations respecting the divine nature, particularly that respecting the plurality of persons in the Godhead, might, *in the times of ignorance*, have been *hard to be understood*, and might also have been liable to be dangerously perverted; while, to the understanding at once cultivated and corrected by wholesome discipline, it affords matter of contemplation, pregnant not less with edification, than with wonder and delight. Its disclosures on the awful subject of the redemption require, even to be particularly understood, an intellect of no puny grasp, and capable of taking no contracted view of the system, on which the government of the universe is

conducted. Its representations of the life to come, by the very rewards which they propose, address themselves to beings raised above the grossness of merely sensual gratification. And its precepts, as they exhibit virtue in her simpler form and more modest attire, presuppose, and tend farther to nourish and invigorate, a refinement of the moral sense, a pure and chastised taste in ethics, which we may vainly seek in the coarser apprehensions of rudeness and ignorance. At the same time, those very precepts, simple as they may appear, have such elastic and expansive force, that, while they fit and apply themselves to the capacity of the lowliest peasant, they afford scope for the exercise of human virtue in its largest, most conspicuous, and most influential sphere of action.

3. And, as the gospel is thus associated with the advancement and cultivation of the human intellect, so, in its tendency to elevate and ennoble our moral nature, we may perceive a farther developement of that principle, on which throughout these

Lectures we have constantly fixed our attention, and which has been the principal clue to guide us in our inquiry, viz. the progressive improvement and exaltation of fallen man, by a course of instruction suited to his circumstances and capacity. The general effect of the fall was to degrade us from our high estate, to fix our affections on things below, and to engage us in pursuits and occupations base, earthly, and sensual. On the other hand, the very essence of the gospel is spirituality. Its most expressive motto is, *Sursum corda.* Its constant aim is to raise us above the objects of sense, to make us *walk by faith, and not by sight*[k]. And, with this view, it, above all things, declares irreconcilable and interminable war with that deadliest foe of all human improvement, the principle of selfishness. When it bids us *deny ourselves*[l]; when it bids us *abstain from fleshly lusts*[m]; when it bids us stifle those emotions of

[k] 2 Cor. v. 7.
[l] Matt. xvi. 24.
[m] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

wounded self-love, which seek to vent themselves in deeds of malice and revenge[n]; when it bids us prefer the interests of others to our own[o]; when it bids us perform our best acts in secrecy, and with no hope of reward from man[p]; when it bids us concentrate in our own persons every moral excellence[q], and aspire to the perfections even of God himself[r]; yet, all this being done, when it bids us assume no honour to ourselves, but, *casting down every high imagination*, declare that we *are unprofitable servants*[s], and that we place all our hopes of acceptance on merits not our own; when such are its dictates, it strikes at the very root from which all evil originates; it inspires principles the most spiritualized, the most defecated from every earthly admixture; and, in whatever degree those principles can be carried into action, in that degree it raises us above our present state of infirmity and corruption,

[n] Matt. v. 38, &c.
[o] Rom. xii. 10.
[p] Matt. vi. 4.
[q] 2 Pet. i. 5.
[r] Matt. v. 48. 1 Pet. i. 15.
[s] Luke xvii. 10.

and assimilates us once more to that image of God, in which we were originally created.

With what success the religion, thus extensive in its range, thus intellectual, thus elevated and spiritual in its character, has been addressed to the world; what has been its progress, what its influence, what are the causes that have principally impeded its operation, and our reasonable expectations for the future, will be our inquiry for the sequel of these Lectures. At present I would simply point out to your notice what, in the actual state of the question, offers itself to the eye of a casual observer. A low-born and indigent person, the inhabitant of a sterile and despised province, himself possessed of no advantages of learning or foreign travel, attended by a few poor, lowly, illiterate, and timorous followers, disclaiming all force and violence, sets about to overturn the religion of the world, and to erect on its ruins a new system, calculated to change and amend the whole aspect of human affairs. Every human probability is against such an enter-

prise; and, if it should succeed, it must surely be that the hand of God is with it. The result we shall now see. The station has been taken; the instruments have been set; and the problem is to move the world.

LECTURE VI.

ISAIAH xlix. 11.

And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

IN our last Lecture, we took a survey of the religious instructions communicated to mankind by our blessed Saviour, during his personal ministry on earth. In these instructions, one circumstance that we were particularly led to notice, was, their adaptation for extensive, for universal reception. Unlike the earliest revelations, they were suited to mankind, augmented in numbers, and advanced in the arts of civil government and cultivated society. Unlike the Jewish dispensation, they were not restricted to one peculiar people, but were addressed to *all nations and kindred and languages.* That this design should take effect; that not only the spiritual and more mysterious benefits of the redemption by Christ should extend to the whole race of man, but that the religion

of the blessed Redeemer should be very generally known and embraced and professed; this had been foretold by the prophets of old time. Here, then, if ever, we might expect to see the operation of that principle, to which in the course of these Lectures we have already adverted, viz. the instrumentality of human events, under the direction of divine Providence, to forward religion in its destined progress. And this principle we believe to have pervaded the whole course of history since, as well as before, the Christian era. Accordingly, in proceeding now to trace the progress of the visible church of Christ, it is my design, not so much to dwell on particular and well known incidents of ecclesiastical history, as to shew how the general course of external events has co-operated with the means, especially established for the propagation of the gospel, and has tended, conjointly, to make the name of Christ known and honoured upon earth.

We have before seen how some events of the Babylonian, of the Persian, and of the Grecian empires were arranged, apparently

with a view to enable those people to imbibe a certain knowledge of divine truth from their tributaries, the Jews. We have seen how the dispersion of the ten tribes served to scatter abroad, through various countries, what may be termed the seeds of the gospel. And more especially we have seen, how the peculiar character of the Roman empire was made instrumental to promote the designs of Providence with respect to Christianity. Its wide extent had afforded means for communication between remote regions; and the nature of its government and laws had promoted, in distant provinces, that civilization, which could not otherwise have reached them, and which we know to be favourable, or, more properly, indispensably necessary, for the due reception of Christianity.

These circumstances undoubtedly gave a great facility for the full use and application, first, of the extraordinary, and then of the ordinary, means employed for the advancement of the gospel. We know, from the authentic records of scripture, that before the death of the last of the apostles,

about the close of the first century, the name of Christ had been preached over a very considerable extent of the Roman empire. Beginning from Jerusalem, the inspired teachers spread themselves gradually over Palestine and the rich and populous countries of Asia Minor. St. Paul, instructed by a heavenly vision sent expressly for the purpose, passed into Europe; and from him, and from other teachers who followed his tracks, several countries of the west heard the word of God. We know also from scripture, that the same word was sounded in some of the islands, and on the southern shores, of the Mediterranean. And, according to some accounts[a], less certain indeed, but not altogether unworthy of credit, it extended itself beyond the limits of the Roman empire, and was preached by apostles or apostolical men in Scythia, Æthiopia, and India.

If, in the second and third centuries, the progress of the gospel was less rapid and brilliant, yet the same external circumstances,

[a] F. Albert. Fabricius, cap. v. "Lux salutaris evange-
"lii toti orbi per divinam gratiam exoriens."

co-operating with the extraordinary endowments still, in a greater or less degree, continued among the preachers of the gospel,—co-operating also with the inherent force of truth and the virtues and exemplary lives of the early Christians,—were assistant causes that Christianity extended itself nearly to the boundaries of the civilized world. In the regions also that had already heard the name of Christ, the remains of idolatry were gradually reduced, and the proselytes of the true faith became so numerous, and so important in their rank and influence, that at length the balance was turned against paganism, and Christianity, in the course of another century, became the dominant and established religion of the Roman empire.

But, although the consolidation of the nations under one government had been useful toward the first introduction and early propagation of Christianity, their continuance in that state would, we have reason to believe, have been prejudicial to the interests of divine truth. In fact, the Roman empire lapsed, after a while, into a con-

dition the most unfavourable for religion; as also for knowledge and liberty, whose welfare is always inseparable from that of religion.

The countries, subject to the Roman sway, had now sunk under a tyranny established on the ruins of liberty; a species of despotism, always the worst that can be imagined, since it contains none of those circumstances, which sometimes qualify and mitigate even the most arbitrary forms of government, that are more regularly, and, if I may so say, more legally constituted. It contained no ancient usages, which, as with the Medes and Persians of old, the monarch, in the pursuit even of his fondest wishes, dared not infringe; no personal privileges attached to classes and particular functionaries of the state, which, as in the monarchies of modern Europe, compel consideration and respect. In the despotism of the Roman empire there was also another circumstance of dreadful aggravation, in comparison with others of modern times, not less severe, perhaps, in theory. There was no check from the observation

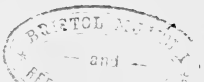
of neighbouring and rival states. With us, we know the salutary influence of public opinion, even between states nominally independent of each other. But the Roman world was subject to one master, a master bound neither by laws nor by usages, and exempt even from the restraints, which rivalry and competition will impose on the most violent and self-willed. And, although the exceptions of excellent princes now and then occur, still the elements of evil were more frequently left to their natural operation, and generated those prodigies of cruelty and licentiousness, which disgrace the line of Roman emperors, and are the astonishment of all subsequent times. Under such a sceptre, every thing that was noble and dignified in human nature dwindled away. There was nothing to give a stimulus to the mind of man; nothing to excite him to distinguish himself in arms, in arts, in science, or in virtue. The name of a Roman, which once bespoke the greatest dignity and energy of our nature, came to be indicative of nothing but effeminacy, profligacy, and pusillanimity. Corruption fer-

mented in every department of the empire. Literature and science decayed. The [b] shades of ignorance were fast gathering around the nations. And the barbarous hordes, who invaded and divided the Roman empire, are wrongfully accused of being the sole authors of a period of gloom which succeeded, and which, if it were hastened, and, for a while, deepened by them, they certainly assisted in the end to dissipate.

From the time, when the Christian religion was associated with such a government, it visibly declined in beauty and purity. Nor can we venture to say to what degradation human society, and, with it, religion, might not ultimately have been reduced, had it not pleased divine Providence to interfere for the rescue of both by means, which, although, at first sight, they may appear to have been ill adapted for any beneficial purpose, prove themselves, nevertheless, to have been useful in the end.

This was the introduction of the wild

[b] Hallam's State of Europe, vol. iii. p. 305, &c.



nations, which shivered in pieces the unwieldy mass of the Roman empire. I must not be supposed insensible to all the atrocities which marked their first irruptions, or to the ages of disorder and violence, which followed their settlement in the different countries that they won. Yet this was an obscuration, through which the world was destined to pass in order to arrive at a period of greater brightness. When we fall back that we may take a more vigorous spring, we cannot be said to lose ground. In our way through a valley, that must be passed to reach a point of high elevation, we can scarcely be said to go downwards. These barbarians, cruel and ignorant as they were, brought with them the germ of a nobler order of things. They conferred on mankind an incalculable benefit, if it were only by destroying an universal monarchy, and by establishing on its ruins independent states, which, by their rivalry and opposition, might act reciprocally as a curb and as a spur each upon the other. But into these states they moreover introduced institutions, which were destined

to infuse a new life and energy into the inert mass of the Roman world, and to produce, in process of time, the most excellent results. They introduced the principles of limited monarchy and of representative legislation, two of the greatest blessings, as also two of the most distinguishing marks, of modern in comparison with ancient times. They also introduced a spirit of personal independence, combined with devoted loyalty; of boldness, tempered by the courtesy, the respect for the female sex, and the purity of manners, which had distinguished them in their native forests[c]; a spirit that was wanted to renovate and to reinvigorate the effete nations of Europe.

But, during the stormy period that elapsed before these precious seeds could vegetate, what became of religion? Religion, as being embodied in an earthly frame, and being able to speak to man only in such language and in such a tone as he could understand, did undoubtedly partake of the evils and disorders of the times. It sunk into a state

[c] Tacitus de Mor. Germ. tom. ii. p. 401. Gronovii.

of much degeneracy and corruption. Yet, even during this period, it had its triumphs; and, adapting itself to the circumstances of the times, it maintained, or rather extended its sway in the world. The rude warriors of that period were, perhaps, as little capable as the Jews of old of understanding religion in its spirituality [d]. But they had senses, which could be struck with impressive forms of worship. They had feelings, which could respect an order of men, who, while they were set apart to administer the sacred ordinances, assumed peace and beneficence as their very badge, and who, alone holding the torch of knowledge, shone with a light, if not great in itself, yet great in comparison with the surrounding gloom [e]. Christianity, in the form which it then

[d] Southey's Book of the Church, vol. i. p. 53.

[e] For the beneficial influence of the ecclesiastical power during the dark ages, (for it is to this period, I would wish it to be observed, that I limit my observations,) see Hallam's State of Europe, chap. ix. part 1. and Miller's Philosophy of Modern History, Lec. vi. p. 297. &c. I may, however, be permitted to add, that the present Lecture was written before I had consulted either of those works.

assumed, not only was able to convert the rude conquerors of the Roman empire to an outward profession of the faith, but also acquired a hold over their minds, which, in the actual circumstances of society, was highly beneficial.

It is seldom that any system can prevail long and extensively, unless it be founded on the wants and be adapted to the circumstances of its times. I speak not now of the excesses and corruptions of the ecclesiastical power. Of these, whether of a theological or of a political nature, many were of a[f] later period than that, of which I am now

[f] The following has been given as a chronological scheme of the progress of the papal corruptions. It is extracted from Edwards's History of Redemption, p. 431, and although by no means complete or unexceptionable in all particulars, may serve to convey a general view of the subject.

Century II. Marriage and eating flesh forbid; Lent enjoined; the keeping of Easter and excommunication begun to be abused.

Cent. III. Keeping of Christmas and Whitsunday enjoined; commemoration of martyrs; sacred vestments; oblations for the dead; sacraments corrupted; new orders of clergymen instituted; and a monastic life applauded.

Cent. IV. Relics venerated; pilgrimages recommend-

speaking, and sprang from the melancholy infirmity of our nature, which can seldom resist the temptation of abusing irresponsible power. To these excesses and corruptions I shall have but too much occasion hereafter to revert, when I come to speak of the causes, which, in later times, have obstructed the progress of the gospel. And

ed; Friday made a fast day; and the clergy forbad to marry.

Cent. V. Pictures, images, and altars erected in churches; tapers burnt at noonday; penance, and prayers for the dead practised; monasteries erected for nuns.

Cent. VI. Sacrifice of the mass; the clergy exempted from the civil jurisdiction; indulgences established; heresy made death.

Cent. VII. Pope made universal bishop; Pantheon dedicated to all the saints; prayers to saints, and the Latin language enjoined.

Cent. VIII. Pope made a temporal prince, and begun to depose kings; image worship enjoined.

Cent. IX. Saints canonized; and transubstantiation maintained; college of cardinals instituted.

Cent. X. Agnus Dei's invented, and bells baptized.

Cent. XI. Purgatory and beads invented.

Cent. XII. The scholastic writers arose.

Cent. XIII. Cup refused to the laity; auricular confession enjoined; jubilee appointed; friars instituted.

Cent. XIV. Indulgences sold.

Cent. XV. Seven sacraments established.

even if we should be disposed to view this system, from the very beginning, under its worst aspect, we may still remember that God often avails himself of very unworthy instruments, to promote his secret purposes. In the present instance, it certainly does appear to have been wisely and beneficially permitted, that, during the darkest ages, the ecclesiastical power, not only should have intermixed itself with much weight and influence in the transactions of the world, but should have been, as it were, embodied and concentrated in a single chieftain, who could control, direct, and apply its operations. I allude of course to the papacy, one of the most extraordinary phenomena, that occur in the moral and political history of mankind.

To the production of this singular power various external circumstances concurred. Its very local situation was a point not unimportant. The bishops of Rome found themselves placed nearly in the centre of Christendom, from whence they could easily communicate with the remote provinces. They also found themselves placed in the city, whose very name was venerable from

the recollection of its former greatness, and which, as it was the principal seat of the knowledge and civilization then extant, possessed that influence, which superiority in intellectual attainments must ever confer. But what the most tended to strengthen them was, the removal of the seat of civil government to Constantinople; a circumstance so important in its consequences, that we may venture to place it among the events, visibly instrumental toward promoting the great designs of Providence. This removal, while, on the one hand, it left the rude nations more at liberty to pursue their wild, but not unprofitable, career, tended, on the other hand, to place the Roman pontiffs in the most important station, in the metropolitan and once imperial city of Europe. Exempted from the presence and immediate control of a master, they were not reduced, like their brethren of the eastern church, to waste their powers in vexatious disputes about certain thorny and barren points of theology. They had before them an ampler field of ambition. And, although I am not insensible (let me

repeat it) in how many points they abused their opportunity; although we must give a sigh to the weakness which made them pervert such advantages; yet let us render them justice, nor let us suppose that they never had any views but to their own wealth and aggrandizement, or that they contributed in no respect to promote the interests of society or of religion.

The circumstances, that gave elevation and ascendency to the papal power, enabled it to confer no slight advantage on society, broken and disjointed as society then was, if it were only that it established one central point, to which the several nations might look with respect and deference; that it formed a bond of union to connect rude, jealous, and untractable states into something like one general system.

But this was by no means all. It more belongs to our course of inquiry to observe, that the same circumstances enabled the Roman pontiffs to be serviceable, in other points, which were more directly connected with religion, and which might have been vainly expected from any secular power, or

even from an hierarchy without wealth and influence, and acting merely by the desultory efforts of individual zeal or piety.

Of these points, the most obvious was the conversion of the heathen. By the irruption of the northern hordes, some countries, which before had embraced Christianity, were relapsed into paganism. Not only, however, were these countries recovered to the dominion of Christ, by emissaries[g] acting under the chief authority of the church; but, penetrating whither neither the ambition nor the enlightened curiosity of the Romans had carried them, the same emissaries advanced the standard of the cross into some of the remoter regions of Europe, which, at successive periods, became members of the Christian commonwealth[h].

Nor did the ecclesiastical power confine its services to the first conversion of those people, but continued to exercise a [i]salutary influence over the minds of its rude proselytes. As, at that period, it neither had

[g] Mosheim, vol. ii. p. 8.

[h] Mosheim, particularly vol. ii. p. 97, 204.

[i] For various interpositions of the church to promote peace, and particularly for an account of the "Truce of

nor pretended to have any military strength, it excited no jealousy among the warlike barbarians; and, trusting solely to the authority of its sacred character, it often was able to strike with awe and remorse the wild chieftain who defied all human ordinances, to preach peace and moderation between infuriated factions, to mitigate the horrors of war and the cruelties of slavery, and to protect those who had no other protectors, to befriend those who had no other friends, on earth.

In these offices, and not less in their other great service, the preservation of learning, the Roman pontiffs had powerful auxiliaries in the monastic orders. I will not pretend to say that these establishments were instituted solely to promote the interests of genuine religion; nor that they were not subject, even at the beginning, and, still more, in later times, to great abuses. But, in the peculiar circumstances of those times, as it was useful that there should be a body of men, ready at hand to undertake any religious services, whether to convert

"God," see Robertson, vol. iv. p. 336. See also Hallam, vol. iii. p. 351.

the heathen or to control and overawe professed Christians;—so no small benefit was derived from their professional labours in cultivating science and learning. In fact, by their care, and by theirs alone, the lamp of knowledge was kept from expiring. In their libraries books were preserved, and their leisure enabled them to multiply copies. The lands, which belonged to the monasteries, always indicated their possessors by their superior cultivation and fertility; the consequence, not only of the more secure protection which they enjoyed, but of the skill of the religious orders in various processes, by which the produce of the earth is increased. Much of their exuberant wealth was also nobly employed in encouraging such of the liberal arts as then survived, and more especially those connected with the services of religion. Painting, though rude, was not unknown. Music was held in high estimation. Of their proficiency in sculpture we still have some interesting and valuable remains. But, more than all, to their taste and skill in architecture we are indebted for those mag-

nificent churches, which, for proportion and for the technical details of the art, are so truly admirable; and which, in all that depends upon the imagination, in their power to impress the mind and excite feelings of devotion and awe, may challenge comparison with the noblest edifices, erected by the most cultivated nations in their most cultivated periods.

Nor, even as time advanced, did the papal power cease to avail itself of its opportunities to spread the name of Christ among heathen nations. As, in early times, it had introduced Christianity into the remoter parts of Europe, so, when the progress of events presented a new field for the extension of the gospel, it was not backward to occupy the ground. We know the great consequences, that have accrued to mankind, from the discovery of the mariner's needle. At a period when the mind of man was becoming restless, and desirous to find some field whereon to exercise its activity, this discovery served, if not to generate the spirit of maritime discovery, yet to give to that spirit a strong impulse and a powerful

assistance, without which it could not have effected any thing great. In process of time, it led to the discovery of another hemisphere beyond the Atlantic, and to the new passage into India. With the vast changes, which these events have made in the state and condition of the world, I have at present no more to do than to remark, that they opened a new and immense range for the farther diffusion of Christianity, especially in the new world. I must not be supposed ignorant of the arrogant pretentions of the papal power to dispose of those new discovered regions, or of the selfish motives which dictated those pretensions. Neither was the zeal of its missionaries always pure, nor the measures which they employed either warrantable in themselves, or such as were likely to give the greatest and most permanent effect to their labours. Still, on a view of the whole question, their conduct in the early transactions of America stands [k]honourably distinguished from the cruelty and remorseless fanaticism of

[k] See Robertson, vol. ix. p. 308. and vol. xi. p. 8, &c.

the soldiery. And when we advert to the dreadful nature of the idolatries that prevailed in some of those countries; and when we farther consider, that we should in vain seek for any other human instruments, by whom the task of conversion could then have been undertaken;—we shall be disposed to recollect, not unthankfully, that by the ecclesiastical agents the old superstitions were overthrown, and the knowledge of Christ introduced into regions of the globe, that bear no slight proportion to the parts before known. At least the precious seed was sown. And if, with that seed, much of a pernicious nature was intermixed, we look forward with confidence to the time, when the weeds shall be gradually eradicated, and the *wheat* be left to sustain and *make glad the heart of man* with the pure *bread of life.*

But the ecclesiastical power, which seems to have been permitted to arise in accordance with the wants of mankind during the darker ages, was, as I have before remarked, mixed up with much evil; and it came at length completely to realize the fright-

ful [k]description, by which it had been prophetically delineated in the Apocalyptic vision. Many of its institutions, which might have been useful at first, were converted, in process of time, into instruments for obtaining and extending a spiritual usurpation. Doctrines were invented the most monstrous and the most unscriptural, but, at the same time, the most admirably contrived for the purposes of acquiring authority over the minds and consciences of men. And its spiritual chieftains, feeling the sure effects of uncontrolled power, came but too often to exhibit in their personal conduct a profligacy, disgraceful not only to their sacred character, but to human nature. Both in its origin and in its decline, papacy bears a strong analogy to chivalry; both of which seem to have been institutions of an extraordinary nature, suited to an extraordinary state of society, and calculated to have been remedial, the one to the want of the due administration of justice, the other to the want of the due dispensation of religion.

[k] Revelation xvii.

But as chivalry was incompatible with the regular dominion of law, so the papacy was unsuitable to a state of knowledge and illumination. In process of time society advanced. Anarchy gave way to order, war and violence to tranquillity and regular government. Literature and science came again to be cultivated. As might have been expected under such circumstances, the mind of man, even partially enlightened, began to perceive, not only the corruptions and abuses of the papal institutions, but also the unsound foundation, on which many of its tenets had originally been built. Still it was long before the voice of truth could make itself to be heard, overpowered as it was by the thunders of authority and established usages. The church had indeed been seldom without some faithful sons, to bear testimony to the truth, and to exclaim and protest against the growing corruptions of Rome. In different countries and at different periods of time,[1] individu-

[1] Among those who have had a reputation very inferior to their deserts, we may mention the excellent Robert

als, and even some [m] communities, ventured upon the bold task of exposing the errors, and braving the power, of the pontifical court. And, by gradually preparing the world for a change, these precursors of the

Grosthead, bishop of Lincoln in the reign of Henry the Third. See an account of him in Rapin's History of England, vol. i. b. 8. p. 354. Cave (Historia Literaria, tom. ii. p. 294.) relates of Grosthead, "Ut immodicam curiæ Romanæ in Anglia tyrannidem illicitasque provisiones et reservationes, quas ægre admodum tulit, fortius comprimeret, ipse Romam profectus est, causam istam apud pontificem acturus." And he thus sums up his character: "Vir plane erat, (ut pietatem, vitæ sanctimoniam, reliquasque virtutes Christiano præsule dignas prætermittam,) ingentis animi, acris ingenii, in re literaria, quantum ea ferebant tempora, ad summum pene apicem evectus, totum encyclopædiæ circulum emensus, in literis sacris pariter ac prophanis, in linguarum Hebrææ, Græcæ, Latinæ scientia, in astronomia, et universa philosophia adeo supra communem doctorum sortem eruditus, ut artis magicæ et execrandi cum cacodæmone consortii apud sciolorum vulgus reus parageretur; quod in tam rudi barbaroque sæculo minime mirandum est."

Thomas Bradwardin was another precursor of the Reformation in this country, and has been styled Wickliffe's spiritual father. Toplady's Works, vol. i. p. 189. He died in 1348, not many days after his consecration as archbishop of Canterbury.

[m] There is an interesting account of the Albigenses and Waldenses in Mr. Gilly's Excursion to the Mountains of Piedmont.

Reformation rendered no slight service to the cause of genuine Christianity, although they were themselves forbidden to gather and enjoy the fruits of their holy labours. In fact, before the world should be quite ready to receive the reformed doctrines, it was necessary for some external events to lend their aid. And of this nature were two events, that have often been noticed; the one, the taking of Constantinople by the Turk; the other, the invention of the art of printing. Of these, the first poured into the western states of Europe a number of men, capable of directing the newly awakened desire of knowledge toward the acquisition of that language, which could not fail to have a considerable effect in reforming religion,—indirectly, by refining and purifying the taste, and directly, by exhibiting to view the sacred scriptures in their genuine and original form: the second obviously tended to the increase of knowledge, and consequently of true religion, by rendering books more numerous, cheap, and accessible. These circumstances could not fail in time to produce some, who should arise

the champions of religious truth, and should be able to assert it with effect. Such champions arose in Luther and in the other reformers. And in the conduct of their adversaries, in the conjuncture of political circumstances at the time, and even in the character of some of the reigning princes, we perceive arrangements [n], which we believe to have been providentially made to give efficacy to the doctrines, urged by the preachers of the reformation. In our own country more especially, it is well known, it is indeed so well known, that it can hardly be necessary to dwell on the subject, in how great a degree the disposition, and even the caprices and passions of the monarch were instrumental toward introducing the reformed doctrines among ourselves; and so, toward erecting a bulwark and citadel for the general safety and protection of protestantism. And at length the good cause prevailed. It prevailed, though not so completely as we might have wished, even in

[n] See some instances in Robertson, vol. v. p. 120, 123, 130, 135, 375.

countries which nominally rejected it; since it would be blindness not to perceive, and unfairness not to acknowledge, that the reformation, by subjecting the Romish church to rivalry, and to the censorship of public opinion, has produced a considerable improvement in its internal discipline, and in the life and conversation of its members. But with still greater efficacy it has prevailed in the protestant churches. It has banished the monastic orders, which had ceased to be in any wise beneficial, and had become nurseries of delusion, idleness, and sensuality. It has banished the celibacy of the clergy, which tended to dissoluteness of manners, and to a preposterous devotion to their spiritual chieftain. It has banished the doctrines of communion in one kind, of transubstantiation, of extreme unction, of masses for souls, of the invocation of the Virgin and saints, of auricular confession, of purgatory, of indulgences; doctrines, for the most part, invented in comparatively later times of popery, for the purpose of investing the clergy with undue influence over the

minds and consciences of men. Above all, it has established the grand, the fundamental doctrine of the supremacy of scripture. It has pronounced the scripture to be the guide of life, the rule of faith, the test of truth. It has declared that no earthly power has authority in religious matters, unless that authority be given by the word of God. It has engendered a spirit of discussion and of liberal inquiry, which, while it has tended gradually to dissipate various illusions and prejudices, has benefited the cause of truth, by dissevering it from an evil and dangerous association with error; and which has placed all that is important, all that is vital in religion on a rock, from whence, we trust, it never can be dislodged.

And what has been the result of these changes? That the liberty of discussion has sometimes degenerated into licentiousness; that the mind of man, emancipated from its shackles, has sometimes abused its freedom, and run wild into excess, we know and acknowledge with the most sincere regret. We are also aware that there has arisen an almost endless series of controversy, where-

in the spirit of Christian charity has too often been forgotten, in the eagerness of dispute and the keen desire of victory. But, with a full perception and free confession of these abuses, we still may ask, has not the cause of Christianity prospered? It is since the period, when the mind of man has been awakened from its torpor, and when religion, like other matters, has been a subject for investigation, that the true interests of the gospel have been promoted. We now possess a number of treatises, in which the evidences of revealed religion are set forth with so much weight and precision, that we receive our faith, no longer merely as that of the country, in which we chanced to be born, but as that, to which, after fair inquiry, we are disposed to give our voluntary and reasonable assent. The real and genuine doctrines of Christianity are set forth in a conspicuous light, with little danger that hereafter it shall be in the power of any one, in order to serve a sinister purpose, either to *add unto them, or to take away from them*[o]. The rules and maxims of Chris-

[o] Revelations xxii. 18, 19.

tianity, although, I am well aware, far from influencing, to the degree that might be desired, the conduct of mankind, are yet more generally known and recognised. They are interwoven into the whole frame of society. And, while, in many instances, they produce a high tone and cast of moral character, such as may in vain be sought in any other school,—they have a very considerable influence even on numbers who reject and renounce them; since many an unbeliever, while he imagines that he is adopting the deductions of his own reason, receives and acts upon principles of conduct, which he has derived unconsciously from the gospel of Christ.

And if, after the agitations and convulsions which followed the establishment of the reformed doctrines, the Christian world appeared to sink into a state of calm and indifference, seldom favourable either for the diffusion of Christianity or for its influence upon the hearts of men;—still, if we will open our eyes, we can hardly fail to perceive the course of external events, in more recent times, shaped and directed with

a view to give a farther advancement to the cause of divine truth. No one can be more thoroughly sensible than myself of our natural tendency to give an undue importance to events, which we have ourselves seen, and to believe that objects, which from their proximity are great to our eyes, are really of a dimension larger than others removed to a distance. But, with a perfect conviction on this subject; with a determination not wilfully to swell the circumstances in question into an unreal magnitude;—still, I think, it cannot be denied that the events, which, for almost the half of a century, have convulsed Christendom, have had, and promise still farther to have, the effect of promoting the Christian cause both within and without its present pale. Nor, if such be the truth, can it be called superstitious credulity, to be persuaded that they have, all along, been directed by divine Providence to this very end.

Previously to the period to which I allude, the great vice of the Christian world was a forgetfulness of the blessings of Christianity. Enjoying its doctrines, its ordi-

nances and its precepts in peace, it seems to have received them, like the blessings of the common sun and air, with little regard to the bounteous hand from whence they proceeded. Feeling itself strong, the human mind fancied that the staff, on which it had leaned, was an encumbrance and an hinderance; that the religion, which had materially contributed to carry society onwards to its actual state, was now an impediment to its further progress. With respect also to the principles of the gospel, no immediate mischief being observed to result from their open and public violation, they were sinking into a state of much disregard. And a most preposterous admiration was bestowed upon persons, who employed the talents, by which they possessed an influence over the minds of men, to the purposes of undermining and overthrowing the gospel. But the Christian world was destined to receive a salutary lesson in the severe school of adversity. The real tendency of the anti-christian doctrines was seen, it was felt by

painful experience, in the long series of public calamities, which ensued from the attempt to carry them into public practice. These calamities, it appears, were permitted to visit almost every country in Europe, that the lesson might come home to the personal feelings of all. They were permitted, in a more especial manner, to visit the great ones of the earth, and, in this visitation, must have so experimentally convinced them of the value and importance of Christianity, that we may venture to pronounce, it will be long before we again see monarchs joining with philosophers, in an unnatural confederacy to extirpate the gospel. The same storm, and even the agitations which have followed the storm, have moreover so awakened the friends and defenders of religion from the lethargy, which long peace and security had tended to engender, that they have given rise to various institutions and internal arrangements, which promise fair to place Christianity on firmer grounds than ever, and to produce upon the manners and morals

of mankind that beneficial effect, which must ever ensue from the purification and extension of the true faith.

And, while these benefits have been conferred upon the internal condition of the Christian world, the same course of events has had a tendency, no less manifest, to the extension of Christianity into new and distant regions. The wars, which have lately been waged, have been conducted on a scale of such magnitude, and have taken such a peculiar turn, as to have given an impulse and excitement to some countries, commonly placed beyond the influence of European states. It has also been the especial character of those wars to compel some of the parties engaged, and those the most considerable in influence, to seek for aid and strength by the extension of their commerce, and by the creation of the ties which commerce produces, with remote countries. The consequence is, that regions, which, within the memory of some not very old among us, were considered almost as belonging to another world, now come within the political relations of Christian Europe. Im-

mense regions, that profess the basest idolatry, have even become directly subject to the most enlightened of the Christian powers. And the advance of commerce and navigation, which every year witnesses, together with the invention and improvement of processes, by which the intercourse of nations is facilitated and expedited;—these things bring the Christian and idolatrous world into closer and closer contact. *Many*, says the prophet [p], *shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.* It is impossible that this state of things should not have a considerable effect upon the extension of genuine Christianity. More or less of zeal, measures more or less judicious, may expedite or may retard the consummation, to which we look forward. But it would betray a culpable distrust in the truth or in the potency of our holy religion; it would betray a strange inobservance of the whole tenor of history, to doubt that the subject and more barbarous regions must, sooner or later, imbibe from their masters much of their policy, much of their manners, much

[p] Dan. xii. 4.

of their religion. Already we see light breaking in upon people, that have long sate in the darkness of idolatry, or in the not much less thick darkness of Mahometan or papal error. And without meaning to deny that a long, to us shortlived mortals, a *very* long period must be expected to elapse, before these beginnings shall proceed to their full completion,—we yet surely may venture to say, that a commencement has been given to a series of events, which shall not terminate, till many countries now benighted shall be visited by the day-star from on high; many, that are partially enlightened, shall receive a brighter illumination; and there shall be at least a visible progress toward that state, foretold by the prophets, *when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea* [q].

Nor can I conclude this view of the external history of the gospel without briefly observing, that the nation, to which I have alluded, as appearing to be designed by

[q] Isaiah xi. 9. Hab. ii. 14.

Providence to bear the principal part in this great work, is our own. If partiality and an undue opinion of our own importance do not deceive us, we seem to be appointed by circumstances, [r] it has been thought even by an especial prophecy, to this task. I would fain hope that some motive higher than ambition or the lust of gain,—that a fair desire to enlarge the sphere of knowledge and civilization, and, by consequence, of religion and of happiness,—has led us, not only to connect ourselves with every known region of the globe, but to brave the terrors of undiscovered oceans and continents. But, from whatever motive this part may have been assumed by us, it is clear that it imposes on us correspondent duties. As no other Christian government has ever come into contact, at a greater number of points, with idolatrous nations, so has none ever been responsible, in a greater degree, for the religious improvement of countless millions of our fellow-creatures. It cannot be proper for me,

[r] See Mr. Faber's Patriarchal, Levitical, and Christian Dispensations, vol. i. p. 372.

on the present occasion, to enter into any details as to the measures fit to be taken for the conversion of the heathens, subject to our authority or to our influence. But it may not be improper to advert to the great principles, which should direct our conduct. It is clearly desirable that by no rash or precipitate steps we should nip in the bud that plant, which may hereafter blossom and bear fruit to the glory of God and to the promotion of his holy religion. But, on the other hand, it is no less clearly desirable, that no timidity, no lukewarmness nor want of zeal, should prevent us from taking decisive, though judicious, measures, for the attainment of that great object. Most of all, it is desirable that, where our power directly exists, we take care that the means of religious instruction, connected with our own excellent church, be provided in every one of our foreign dependencies; at present for the benefit of those who now call on the name of Christ; and prepared to receive and to nourish those, who may hereafter be converted to the knowledge of the gospel. If such cares

be neglected, we may rest assured that the neglect will recoil with dreadful violence, with dreadful vengeance, on our posterity, if not on ourselves. If they be regarded, it is not for me to say what glories may be destined for this land by Him, who has pronounced that *righteousness exalteth a nation*[s]. It is said, that every state is destined to go through a course of growth, maturity, and decay. Such may, perhaps, be the law of human nature, in nations, as in individuals. But this at least may be asserted, that the experiment yet remains to be tried, how solid may be the glory, and how durable may be the prosperity of that country, which, in its domestic conduct, fosters every measure conducive to religion and virtue; and, in the administration of its less enlightened dependencies, endeavours to train them to the knowledge of the true God, and to obedience to the laws of the *everlasting gospel.*

[s] Prov. xiv. 34.

LECTURE VII.

COLOSSIANS iii. 9, 10.

—Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.

WE have now considered the progress of the visible church of Christ on earth. We have observed its rise from the smallest beginnings; and have seen the course of human events in every subsequent period of history, and not the least in our own times, arranged apparently to expedite and promote its success. But the gospel, though it should be known and professed in every region of the earth, will have failed of its principal design, unless it be also found to have made those, whom it has visited, better in this world, and consequently more fit for a state of future glory. Our Lord himself perpetually exhorts his disciples to

amendment of life, to a change and renewal of their very nature. And, with a view to lead us to godliness; to rescue us, not only from the penalty, but from the power of sin; he has imparted his precepts full of heavenly wisdom, and he has exhibited the pattern of his own blameless life during his ministry on earth. The great apostle, who so strenuously insists on the spiritual benefits of the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, tells us moreover, that he gave *himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*[a]. And that this gracious design has not been altogether frustrated; that, in spite of the manifold transgressions of individuals professing the gospel, the Christian world, on the whole, has advanced in virtue as well as in religious knowledge; that, as God has been more fully revealed, his laws have been better obeyed, and his perfections better imitated; in a word, that the great cause of human improvement has been promoted;

[a] Titus ii. 14.

this is what I would endeavour to establish in the present Lecture.

But I would wish first to offer two or three general observations.

In the first place, in order justly to appreciate the present benefits derived to us from the gospel, we should resist the constant tendency of familiarity and long enjoyment to weaken the perception of any blessing; and we should endeavour to figure to ourselves what might, even to the present day, have been our state, if Christianity had not interposed for our instruction and improvement. For this purpose it is proper to notice what reason alone had been able to effect for man, and from a view of its past achievements, to form a probable estimate of what it might afterwards have accomplished, if it still had been left to its own exertions.

In the next place, we should observe that Christianity has done much for the benefit even of many persons, who abjure its authority. If, in religious speculations, it be thought that certain moderns of the deistical school have spoken, with a considerable

degree of clearness and accuracy, on some points, as it is termed, of natural theology; it should be remembered that these persons have lived within the days of the gospel; and that, when men have been accustomed, from the first dawn of intellect, to hear particular principles recognised by universal consent, it is difficult to suppose they have not received material assistance in their speculations on such subjects, however they may persuade themselves they adopt nothing but the deductions of their own reason. Or if, in the question of morals, it be urged that little difference can be perceived between the lives of Christians and of unbelievers,—even on the supposed, but by no means admitted justness of this observation,—it should be noticed that where Christianity forms the religious code of a nation;—where it enters into the public institutions, and into most of the transactions of private life;—where thousands of voices are constantly occupied in illustrating its doctrines and inculcating its maxims;—the very air, if we may so say, becomes impregnated with the spirit of the

gospel. Men, in the ordinary commerce of life, do not refer to their first principles, on every light occasion. They follow the current of the world, and act as they see others around them act. If a particular set of opinions be generally recognised, they adopt them in practice without any minute regard to their origin. If a high standard of morals be established in society, they endeavour to come up to it, from the force of example, or from a desire to maintain a fair character with their friends and neighbours. As the source, from whence actions proceed, is open to the eye of God, they will, indeed, be estimated by him according to the principle to which they owe their birth. But an act, which has been done by one man in obedience to the declared will of God, and by another in conformity with common usage, may to human eyes appear in the same light. And the apparent similarity may give rise to an inference very unfair to Christianity, unless we bear in mind, that the influence of the gospel is so considerable as to correct and amend the practice of many, who renounce and vilify it.

Again, as much praise, to which Christianity is fairly entitled, has been withdrawn from it, so it has, on the other hand, been blamed for much, of which it is entirely guiltless. The vices, which have belonged to some of its professors, have been imputed, not to the corrupt nature of man, which even the best religion cannot entirely correct, but to the religion itself. And, if there be some few evils, to which it may appear, at first sight, to have given the especial occasion,—such, for instance, as persecution and religious wars,—it should be remembered that these have sprung, not from genuine Christianity, which abhors and condemns them, but from Christianity misunderstood, perverted, and abused. The fact is, it is easy to be calm and tolerant in matters whereon we are indifferent. But, where a religion, like that of the gospel, occupies a very important department in human life, where it comes home to the business and bosoms of men, it will naturally awaken a lively and keen feeling: and this feeling, until it be corrected, as it undoubtedly will be corrected, by a closer acquaintance with the true spirit of the

gospel, is apt at times to flame forth into an intemperate and destructive zeal. But the possibility of abuse always exists in proportion to the potency, and, consequently, the capability of good, in the principle. Nor should we condemn Christianity on the score of its occasional misapplications, unless we are at the same time prepared to pronounce, that neither liberty nor learning are blessings, because they both have been perverted to evil purposes. And it should be farther observed, that, in the great majority of cases that have been cited against Christianity, Christianity has in fact had nothing to do with the matter. It has been used merely as a pretence; it has been a vizard outwardly assumed. Designing men, knowing that religion forms a sensitive, a responsive string in the human heart, have touched it that it might grate harsh music, and that, in the discord which ensues, they might find or create an opportunity to pursue their own selfish and sinister purposes.

These few observations having been premised, let us now proceed to trace the be-

neficial effects of the gospel, as briefly as the magnitude and importance of the subject will permit, on the great structure of human society.

And, first, let it not be a matter of surprise, if we are tempted to express a doubt, whether the revelation of Christ be not the sole cause that idolatry is not, to this day, the religion of the civilized world; and that it is not recommended even by philosophers, who, in secret, and to their more initiated disciples, might teach a purer and a sounder faith. At least, such a suspicion should not be thought extravagant, until there can be cited any one instance of a nation, which, after having yielded to idolatry, has been able, by the mere force of reason, and without any aid from revelation, to turn to the public, recognised, exclusive worship of the one true God, the creator and the ruler of the universe. History, I believe, furnishes no such example. It certainly must not be sought among the followers of Mahomet, since it is obvious their favourite tenet of the unity of the Godhead, although perverted and distorted from the truth as it is

in the gospel, has been derived from Christianity. And, if we are thus indebted to the gospel, and to the gospel alone, for the extirpation of idolatry, this debt by itself is of incalculable amount and value. An obvious defect of idolatry, as it affected the question of human virtue and happiness, was its total separation from morality. To view it, in the first instance, in its least exceptionable and offensive form, it consisted merely of a few idle pageantries and insignificant observances. But, in performing this worship, there was an entire want of that feeling, which arises in the heart of a Christian, as he approaches a God, who is himself of infinite purity, and who declares that *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil*[b]. The rules of pagan worship were prescribed in no book, which, at the same time, inculcated maxims of exalted virtue, and which, in exhibiting the object to be adored with divine rites, exhibited a character where every excellence was embodied and exemplified. The priests were men appointed

[b] Hab. i. 13.

merely to perform the ceremonial rites of religion; not, as under the Christian system, separated from the rest of society, and expressly and professionally appointed, not only to be themselves *thoroughly furnished unto all good works*, but to admonish and exhort others to righteousness, and to maintain and enforce, in every point, the inseparable connection between a pure faith and a holy life.

And it would have been well, if the evils of paganism had been confined to these negative defects, to this want of efficacy to promote any useful purpose. But it also tended to direct and positive and grievous evil. Over its impurities, over its indecencies, not only permitted, but sanctioned and prescribed, it is better to draw a veil. But its cruelties stand forth to the eye. In every system of idolatry a nearer inspection convinces us, that the beautiful picture of youths and virgins, presenting their oblations of fruits and flowers before the shrine of some bloodless deity, is but a vision of the imagination. In every country it tended to harden the heart, and, consequently, to

debase the moral feelings. In every country from[c] east to west, from north to south, blood, human blood, reeked on its altar. But, not to refer you to the well known cruelties of ancient superstitions, nor to lose ourselves in the innumerable instances of sanguinary worship, which modern idolatries present; let us select only two cases; let us first look to Mexico, at the period of its discovery, where the[d] hideous and appalling aspect of the idols seemed to indicate the dreadful worship which they witnessed, where the prisoners of war were solemnly immolated in the temple with rites the most ferocious, and where, to omit instances[e] of extraordinary sacrifice, whose horrors almost forbid belief, the more mo-

[c] The reader, who desires to see the extent to which human sacrifice has been carried in ancient and in modern superstitions, may see a great collection of facts in the illustrations of the Archbishop of Dublin's work on the Atonement, N°. 5, and in Ryan's History of the Effects of Religion on Mankind, vol. i. p. 56. &c.

[d] Robertson, vol. x. p. 308, 427.

[e] In Mexico their king Ahuitzol sacrificed sixty-four thousand and eighty men in the year 1468 at the consecration of a temple. Ryan, vol. i. p. 255.

derate computations make the human victims annually slaughtered to amount to some thousands. We may next turn our eyes to another part of the world, and see the true nature of idolatry displayed in our own days, and almost under our own eyes. We may look to India, and see devotees practising the most unnatural and torturing penances, parents and children exposed to be devoured by wild beasts, widows compelled to ascend the funeral pyre, and frantic crowds seeking death in its most frightful shapes by self-immolation. Let us reflect on these enormities, and then remember, that they are dictated by a remorseless and debasing superstition.

A religion, which, in all respects, is the reverse of this picture, a religion, which, by its doctrines, its precepts, its sanctions, its examples, its institutions, is especially careful to prescribe and maintain purity in our personal conduct, and tenderness and mercy toward others, could hardly, we should suppose, be found to have been entirely inoperative to beneficial purposes. Accordingly, let us now look to experience, and let us

endeavour to trace its operation in some of the great departments of human life.

Let us look first to the effect of Christianity upon public and international policy. It is unhappily for the purposes of mutual annoyance and destruction, that independent states come, for the most part, into direct contact with each other. And, although Christianity certainly has not yet been able to make wars altogether cease in the world, it has had the power considerably to mitigate them. I will not in this instance refer you to wild and barbarous tribes in their conduct of war, but rather to the most admired people of pagan antiquity. Let us observe the Roman refusing quarter in battle, and, if not slaughtering his prisoners, yet subjecting them to indignities and miseries, perhaps worse than death, trampling on their neck, sending them under the yoke, leading them in triumph, exposing them publicly to sale, and reducing them to slavery. Let us next turn to Christian nations, and let us see them adopting into their code of public law the rules that, in hostilities, no gratuitous, no unnecessary

pains, none that have not a direct tendency to bring the war to a successful termination, are warrantable; and that on prisoners there should be imposed [f] no restrictions nor privations but those, which prevent them, for the time, from injuring their enemy. Let us consider this contrast, and then say whether the spirit of the gospel, which breathes through our institutions, and which particularly inculcates mercy toward enemies, has not been mainly instrumental toward producing this honourable change.

From international policy let us direct our eyes to the civil government of Christian states. And here, whatever we may choose to say about their despotic forms, however much we may regret that they have not yet approached nearer to a perfect standard, we surely must perceive them to be, at least in practice and in execution, if not in theory, much in advance beyond the capricious, the wanton, the extravagant cruelty, the total disregard for the feelings or for the lives of human creatures, which

[f] Vattel, Droit des Gens, l. iii. c. 8.

marked the despotisms of old times, or those, which, in the present day, are strangers to the name of Christ. For much of this melioration we clearly are indebted to the gospel. There cannot be a greater calumny than to represent Christianity as favourable to despotism. In fact it does not interfere with forms of government. But, while, at its first promulgation, it studiously avoided even the appearance of taking any part in political matters; while, at all times, it enjoins as a religious duty the propriety of submitting peaceably to legitimate authority; it has introduced principles, which could not fail to produce a sure and steady, though not, perhaps, strikingly perceptible effect in improving the administration of governments. It has established the rights of man, in the true, the legitimate, the Christian sense of the expression. It declares the perfect equality of all mankind, in the great points of their equal dependence on the same almighty Creator, and their equal responsibility to the same almighty Judge. It declares that kindness and consideration are due from all to all,

without respect of persons. These principles, in whatever degree they are carried into execution, cannot fail to introduce a certain amendment into the administration, and, ultimately, into the constitution, of governments. They teach that, as all mankind are precious in the sight of God, their lives may not be wantonly sacrificed, their properties may not be arbitrarily seized, their persons may not be cruelly tormented, their feelings may not be capriciously harassed. And it surely would be injustice to deny, that these principles of Christianity, co-operating with the advancement of knowledge and civilization, have already produced, and promise in a much greater degree yet to produce, an immense improvement in the condition of that very large portion of mankind, who are the subjects of civil government.

From public, let us turn our views to private life. And here, I think, we shall see the beneficial effects of Christianity yet more strikingly demonstrated. The female sex, a moiety of the human race, is under a debt of peculiar obligation to the gospel. As the woman, in punishment for her ori-

ginal transgression, was made subject to the man, so, throughout the times of paganism, we invariably find her in a state of degradation. But in nothing is the restorative tendency of the gospel more apparent, than in her reinstatement in her proper rank in society. The whole tenor of the gospel elevates and dignifies the female sex. The Saviour of the world was born, as no one else ever was born, of woman; and among women he found some of his most zealous friends and devoted disciples. In the earliest annals of Christianity, the female converts occupy a prominent station, and they were permitted to bear no unimportant part in the administration of the infant church. The apostolical precepts respecting the conduct of women are all such as tend to give them respectability, by making them [g] worthy of respect; and, when they treat of the conjugal relation, they invariably speak of reciprocal [h] duties between the husband and the wife. In the conjugal relation, the gospel moreover has not a little improved

[g] 1 Pet. iii. 2. &c. 1 Tim. iii. 11. v. 3. &c.
[h] Eph. v. 22, 25. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 7.

the condition of the woman, by forbidding polygamy and by diminishing the facility of divorce. Where a plurality of wives is permitted, constant experience tells us, the woman is taught to consider herself merely as the object of the sensual passions of man; and, being trained for no higher rank in the sphere of domestic life, she contracts all the slavish fear, all the low cunning, all the petty jealousy, all the debasing ignorance, incidental to such a station. Where divorce can be too readily obtained, she is liable, when the passion of man has once been satiated, to be cast off and abandoned. Or, where the connection continues to subsist, much of that obligation to mutual concession and mutual endearment, which arises from the indissoluble nature of the bond, is withdrawn. But, when the gospel removed these evils, God may be said once [i] more to *have brought the woman unto the man*, and to have presented her to him, in a sense which long had been scarcely applicable, as the partner of his life

[i] Gen. ii. 22.

and the mother of his children; and by this happy change he has added incalculable strength to the whole structure of domestic virtue.

Observations somewhat similar may be made respecting the next great relation of human life, that of parent and child. We know the inordinate and cruel powers, which, in the most cultivated states of pagan antiquity, were possessed by the father over his children. He might at first refuse to rear them; for many years he continued to hold their life at his pleasure; and he was encouraged always to maintain toward them that distant and forbidding regard, which belongs more to the master toward his slave, than to the father toward his son. But better things have been taught by the gospel. Not only is the murderous power of life and death withdrawn, but a more affectionate, a more liberal intercourse between parent and child is introduced. And, while the son receives no encouragement to relax in his filial duties, the parent, both by the [k] specific precepts and by the general

[k] Eph. vi. 4. Col. iii. 21.

spirit of the gospel, is taught to provide for the temporal and spiritual welfare of his offspring, and to temper his just authority with kindness and gentleness.

Neither, in the change thus introduced into the conjugal and parental relations, can it be said that what is gained by the one party is lost by the other. It is an invariable law of human nature, that despotism should recoil with painful violence upon the despot. The excessive powers, possessed by the husband and father of old times, were inimical, not less to his own happiness, than to that of the subjects of his domestic tyranny; and whatever degree of authority he has lost is more than compensated by the different feelings introduced into private life. No longer an arbitrary master, he must love and respect, while he rules, his family; and, on their part, the trembling fear of the slave gives place to the willing obedience and the cheerful duty, which arise from a sense of benefits received, from a voluntary compliance with the suggestions of reason and religion, from the free-will offering of the heart.

Let us next look to another very important relation of domestic life, that of master and servant. It is unnecessary to dwell on the painful and frightful details of the system of slavery in pagan times. It may be sufficient to say, that in the state, the most celebrated for wisdom in ancient times, the number of slaves, of human beings, who held their lives by no other tenure than the will of an arbitrary master, was of fearful [k] amount. The religion of Christ immedi-

[k] I am not aware of any exact calculation of the amount of the slave population of ancient Rome. But from incidental accounts we are led to suppose that it must have been very great. To shew the numbers Gibbon, (vol. i. p. 66.) quotes Pliny (Hist. Nat. l. xxxiii.) and Athenæus (Deipnosophist. l. vi. p. 272.) which latter asserts that he knew very many Romans who possessed, not for use, but ostentation, ten and even twenty thousand slaves. The historian of the Decline and Fall also refers to Seneca, De Clementia, l. i. c. 24. whence it appears that a proposition to distinguish the slaves by their dress was abandoned on account of the danger to be apprehended from a discovery of their numbers; "Deinde apparuit quantum periculum immineret, si servi nostri numerare nos cœpissent." See also Seneca, De Tranquillitate Animi, c. 8. The 47th. Ep. of Seneca gives a melancholy picture of the ordinary treatment of slaves. In Tacitus, Ann. l. xiv. c. 43, 44. there is an account of four hundred slaves being put to death for a murder committed by one of their number.

ately addressed itself to correct this monstrous evil. Without forcibly disturbing the arrangements of society, by merely inculcating maxims, which inevitably lead to the practice of justice and humanity, it gradually relaxed the bonds of slavery; first, by procuring a milder treatment for those unhappy beings; and next, by emancipating the domestic, and, in later times, the predial slaves. Nor, while it is universally acknowledged that this triumph over inhumanity is mainly due to the exertions of the Christian religion, can there be a stronger proof of the gradual and imperceptible, and, consequently, wise manner in which the triumph was effected, than that no point in modern history is involved in greater obscurity, than the precise mode and time of the cessation of slavery. May both the process and the result be the same, in the attack which the gospel is now making on the last remains of slavery in the Christian world!

As somewhat analogous to the system of slavery, we may also mention the sanguinary shows of gladiators, exhibited by the Romans for the amusement of the pub-

lic, and even introduced to enliven private entertainments. This was a practice against which the Christian teachers from the beginning remonstrated, and which was forbidden for the first time by the first Christian emperor.

Nor should we omit to observe the effects of Christianity on one other grand and more general division of society, the rich and the poor. A very remarkable circumstance in heathen ethics, a circumstance arising, probably, from their system of domestic slavery, is the almost total omission of any duties owed by the rich to the more indigent classes of society. This disregard extended even beyond this life, and their imaginary elysium appears to have been open only to those, whose [1] eminence in station or in talents enabled them to confer extensive benefits on their fellow-creatures, to heroes, po-

[1] Hic manus, ob patriam pugnando vulnera passi,
Quique sacerdotes casti, dum vita manebat,
Quique pii vates, et Phœbo digna locuti,
Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes,
Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo:
Omnibus his nivea cinguntur tempora vitta.

ÆNEID. VI. 660.

ets, artists, or statesmen. But the gospel, which was preached by poor men, addressed itself to the poor, and also took them under its especial care. Hence, wherever the gospel prevails, the poor are become the objects of a commiseration and a sympathy, before unknown. And in the various provisions for their corporal, for their mental, for their spiritual welfare; in the numerous establishments for the relief or the solace of almost every evil that flesh is heir to; we see a delightful testimony rendered by most Christian nations to the efficacy of the precepts of the gospel. History records with grateful pleasure the name of the [m] Christian matron, the first person who ever founded an hospital for the sick and necessitous.

I need not, however, remark, that of charity,—of that great evangelical grace which Christianity has designated as peculiarly its own,— bounty to the poor is but one branch. We know its comprehensive character, its extensive bearings, expounded and enforced as it has been by the eloquent language of

[m] Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hist. vol. iii. p. 71.

the apostolical writers, and by the still more forcible eloquence of their lives. We know the tendency of charity, in its enlarged signification, to humanize society, to sweeten ordinary life, to mitigate, almost to subdue, every calamity that can afflict our nature. And if now, turning our views from particular departments and relations of life, we will survey the Christian world at large, we may indeed be tempted to lament, that the precepts of the gospel have not yet been more perfectly carried into execution; but we must still be inclined to believe they have been practised to a degree, that has materially promoted the well-being of society. The gospel, as it has tended to tranquillize the irascible passions, to restrain the emotions of malevolence and revenge, to make men placable under injuries, and patient under afflictions; in all this, it has breathed over human life a calm unknown to other systems, and most conducive to happiness. It is true, in order to perceive these blessed effects, we should not so much appeal to public history. I feel, indeed, thoroughly convinced, and have endeavoured to

shew, that, even into public life, Christianity has already introduced great improvements, and promises, as it shall gradually disencumber itself of all the rubbish by which it has been overlaid, to introduce improvements yet greater. But, for the point now in question, we should look chiefly to those, whose names will never be blazoned in the page of history. We must look to the walks of private life. Nor is more necessary than that each man should cast his eyes around on the circle, with whom chance or choice has made him acquainted. And I think it may be said he has been unfortunate, if he does not instantly see numbers quietly, calmly, unostentatiously pursuing the path of private virtue; labouring, under no eye but that of God, to regulate their own lives; and seeking, with no view to human applause, to alleviate the sufferings, or to promote the positive enjoyments, of all with whom they are connected. And, if such be the result to each man of his own observation and experience, let him only suppose that what happens to himself happens also to others; that, in other spheres

and societies, there is an equal number of persons, who are careful, to the best of their ability, to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*[n]; and then let him calculate, if indeed he can hope to calculate, the amount of positive good produced on human society by the blessed influence of the gospel of Christ.

Nor is this all. There are triumphs of Christianity, which never can be known but to the individual who achieves them; and whose fragrance, like that of some precious essences, evaporates the instant that it is opened and exposed. In such cases, the gospel operates unseen, and is known more by its results than in its actual process. When we curb the temper; when we suppress the rising emotions of resentment; when we forgive injuries, not only with our lips, but, in the emphatic language of our Saviour, *from the heart;* when we stifle the licentious passions in their very birth; *when we bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*[o]; these things, as they

[n] Luke i. 6. [o] 2 Cor. x. 5.

tend not to correct, but to intercept and prevent evil, can scarcely, from their very nature, be known to others. Their praise altogether consists in their secrecy. But He, *who seeth in secret, shall reward them openly;* since to Him is known, not only the difficulty of the achievement, but also its real importance and its intrinsic value.

And now, having traced the beneficial effects of Christianity on international and on national policy, on some of the great departments of domestic life, as well as on the general composition of society; let us conclude this survey, by endeavouring to delineate that abstract model of perfection, which we suppose might be produced in the Christian school, in contrast with the production of any other system, which has professed with any success to teach moral excellence.

In seeking our contrasts to the gospel, we are perpetually remitted to the celebrated states of Greece and Rome, both as being the states of paganism the best known to us, and also as being those, which are admitted by universal consent to be the ex-

emplar nations, and which, consequently, enable us to make our comparisons with the greatest fairness. Of those two states, the former, we know, was more especially the mistress of philosophy; while the latter people, as acting on a larger and more conspicuous theatre, furnish the best illustrations of that philosophy carried into action.

The prevalent systems of moral philosophy (for of their psychological systems I do not at present speak) may in general be reduced under two heads. Although there was an infinite number of minor ramifications, the Epicurean and the Stoic systems may be considered as the representatives of the opposite doctrines, which divided the regard of the civilized world. Neither in adverting to those systems, would I delineate them as they were perverted and abused by their injudicious friends, still less as they were misrepresented by their opponents and rivals. Let us rather consider them in their best and purest state.

Of the Epicurean philosophy the great principle was, that the chief good consisted

in pleasure. And to this principle it is a sufficient objection, that it was liable, not to slight and occasional, but to grievous, constant, and unavoidable abuse; since, even to take pleasure in its most enlarged and philosophical sense, few persons would possess such correctness of mental vision, as rightly to foresee what would truly and ultimately promote their pleasurable existence, or such strength of volition, as always to pursue it at the expense of immediate abstinence and self-denial. Still it is unquestionably true, that, neither by his precepts nor by his example, did the founder of the Epicurean philosophy teach that pleasure consisted in sensual and vicious gratification. On the contrary, temperance, chastity, integrity, and other virtues, were recommended and practised by himself, on the principle, that the opposite vices, as they produced in the end disquietude, discredit, and pain, would lead their votaries widely astray from their desired object. But the overwhelming fault of this system was a rooted selfishness. It was from self-interest, it was with a view to self-gratifica-

tion, that the Epicurean was pure or temperate, or just. And, as his very principles withdrew him from the practice of active benevolence, he became an unprofitable member of society. Like his imaginary deity, sufficient to his own happiness, and withdrawn from the cares and fatigues of business, he passed his life in a state of inaction, of secretly cherished satisfaction at the contemplation of his own superiority to the desires and passions, which agitated the common herd.

The Stoic philosophy, on the other hand, led its votaries into active life, though it ill qualified them for discharging its offices with effect. As the Epicurean attempted too little, so the Stoic attempted too much; and the ill effects, which selfishness produced in the one, were in the other produced by pride. The Stoic lived in a world of his own creation, and proceeded on a fantastic, a preposterous, an unnatural view of things. In his overstrained zeal for virtue, he considered every deviation from it as of equal demerit. By his visionary doctrines, he rendered virtue unamiable,

and even ridiculous. In his vain attempt to raise himself above the ordinary feelings of nature, he became harsh and unfeeling. In his regard for the public weal, he neglected the charities, if not the decencies of private life. Grasping at a vast good, and one unattainable from its very vastness, he overlooked that which lay directly before him, and which might have been easily effected. And, at length, disappointed in his aims, and refusing to see that the disappointment was in great measure to be attributed to his own untractable system, he retired in disgust from a world, with which he had lived in perpetual conflict; or ended in a melancholy scepticism as to the real existence of virtue [p].

In contrast to these characters, let us look to the Christian, who carries into execution, as far as the weakness of human nature permits, the precepts of his divine philosophy. He proceeds on no false views of human life. He is taught that he is placed in this world as on a stage, where

[p] See the account of the death of Brutus in Dion Cassius, lib. vii. p. 356. Leunclavii.

he must exercise himself, and must labour to cultivate those habits and dispositions, which will determine his destiny in the life that is to come. The leading principle of his conduct is the desire to promote the glory of God. To the moral law he endeavours to render the strictest obedience, and lives *soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*[q], not merely because such conduct will secure his own ease, but because such is the divine will. By the same principle, carried out of selfish considerations for his own comfort and tranquillity, he endeavours to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures by every labour of love; by great exertions, if occasion for great exertions arise; or, on smaller occasions, by the offices of every-day benevolence and affection. That his labour may not be in vain, he strives, as far as it can be done with innocency, to accommodate himself to the temper and manners of those around him. But, while he is thus engaged in a course of active usefulness, no emotions of self-suf-

[q] Tit. ii. 12.

ficiency swell within his heart. The consciousness of his own weakness and infirmity presses on him too heavily, to permit him for a moment to fancy himself superior to those, whom he endeavours to befriend. Thence meekness and humility lend a grace to every deed of charity. Knowing himself to be liable to the casualties and distresses of life, he *rejoices with them that do rejoice, and weeps with them that weep*[r]. Sensible that he himself stands in need of a favourable and indulgent judgment, he is slow to judge others, and is ready to forgive, as he himself desires forgiveness. To every affliction he patiently submits as to a dispensation from the hands of his heavenly Father, intended to prove or to correct him, and capable, by a right use, of being turned to his present or his future good. Above all, knowing that within him *dwelleth no good thing*, he is *jealous over himself with a godly jealousy*[s], and places the strictest watch upon his heart, as upon that avenue, by which sin first gains an entrance and dominion over him.

[r] Rom. xii. 15. [s] 2 Cor. xi. 2.

Such is a faint, a very faint delineation of a Christian, considered as a member of society. In proportion as Christianity has tended to produce such persons, it has exalted the individual character and promoted the general good, in a manner unknown and scarcely conceived under any other system. That any one has ever realized all these ideal exellencies cannot, we fear, be said. Such holiness is as yet *too excellent for us; we cannot attain unto it*[t]. But, when we consider the long train of Christian worthies who have shone like lights in their day; when we endeavour to calculate how many more, in the shade of retirement, have laboured by *a patient continuance in well-doing*[u], *to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things*[v],—we may not indeed specify individuals,—but we may bless and praise God that he has put his grace into the hearts of so many of his servants; who have shewn, experimentally shewn, of what excellence man is capable, when, with the gospel in his hand, with his eye steadily fixed on the

[t] Ps. cxxxix. 6. [u] Rom. ii. 7. [v] Tit. ii. 10.

great model there held forth for his imitation, and with his heart open to the influences of the Spirit of truth and holiness, he labours zealously and unremittingly to subdue his corrupt nature, and to be renewed *in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*

LECTURE VIII.

2 PETER iii. 13.

We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

I HAVE now endeavoured to trace the progress of the visible church of Christ on earth, and to note the practical effects of the gospel in those countries, where it has been received and professed. Neither this progress nor these effects appear, we trust, to be inconsiderable. Still, it is not improbable, that the more sanguine expectations of the early professors of Christianity may have led them to anticipate for the gospel a wider diffusion, and a more powerful efficacy, than it has yet obtained. We should, it is true, make certain deductions from the language of the old prophets, on the score of the glowing style of oriental poetry. Yet after these deductions have been made in the most ample manner, we must still acknowledge that they speak of the gospel as

being destined to visit and to bless, either at once or in succession, every region of the world; a consummation which, it is clear, has not yet taken place. On a survey of the whole globe, we must admit, and admit with regret, that the theatre, whereon the Christian religion has exerted its beneficial influence, is more contracted than we might desire; and that as yet it occupies a space of less dimensions, than the regions overspread by Mahometanism and pagan idolatry.

A few reflections on this point will naturally form a part of the proposed plan of these Lectures.

It may then be remarked, first, that we should allow time for the operations of an almighty hand. We are naturally impatient to witness the consummation of any scheme, in which we take an interest; nor can we, without difficulty, so far abstract our minds from personal considerations, as to commit its future triumphs to a period, when we shall ourselves be removed from the scene. Hence, when we calculate the brief term allotted to our mortal life, we

are apt to precipitate matters with an impatience, that often defeats its own desires; forgetful that plants, which attain the greatest size and continue to flourish for the longest time, are generally the slowest in their growth. With respect to the Almighty, we forget that with him *a thousand years are as one day* [a], and that He, to whom the past, the present, and the future are at once open, and who with one comprehensive glance surveys the whole system of his creation, may form his plans with bearings so extensive, as to require for their complete execution a duration of time, which to us shortlived mortals appears little less than infinite. In fact, with respect to the Christian dispensation, we do not sufficiently recollect how long a period of time, and how complicated an apparatus of events, were deemed necessary in order to usher it into the world. The course of these Lectures has led us to see, that the preparations for this stupendous event commenced from the very time, when the fall of man first

[a] 2 Pet. iii. 8.

created the need for a future restoration. This restoration was at first obscurely intimated to the original parents of mankind; it was gradually opened by a succession of prophecies more and more distinct; it was figuratively represented by a number of rites, instituted for the express purpose of keeping it alive in the expectations of men; it had its groundwork prepared among a people, who were selected from the rest of mankind, and conducted through a series of the most remarkable events, all directly instrumental to the ultimate design. But *still the end was not yet.* Although the preparatory measures were thus taken, the actual manifestation of Christ was long withheld. Nor was it until four thousand years had elapsed, that it was judged by almighty wisdom that the fulness of time was come, when the prophecies might be accomplished, when the types might be filled up, when the expectation of nations might be answered, and when the design and tendency of these magnificent preparations might be explained by the personal advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In comparison with this vast introduction, the time that has yet elapsed since the promulgation of the gospel,—long as it may appear to man, *the days of whose age are threescore years and ten* [b],—may yet be considered as of no great duration. And when we reflect that many ages may yet pass away, before the great drama shall run into a length disproportionate to its introductory scenes, we may learn to hush our impatience, and to wait with calm acquiescence for another state of existence, when we may be exulting spectators of its ultimate and complete success.

There is also another way of viewing the subject, which, while it contributes to explain the slow progress that the gospel has yet made, may teach us patience and humility for the present, and may serve, at the same time, to establish some grounds of probability, whereon to build our expectations for the future.

Since the days of the apostles and their early successors, the gospel, although ever

[b] Psalm xc. 10.

under the influences of the Holy Spirit, and with the solemn promise of God that it shall finally prevail, has yet been left to be advanced by man;—and by man, no longer in the infancy of his species, when, his mind being yet scarcely developed, it was expedient that he should be kept in a sort of tutelage, and be guided by the constant and visibly operating superintendence of a superior power. In the adult state of the human race, no less than of the human individual, man is properly left to a free agency of conduct, as with the knowledge of good and evil, so with the power to embrace the one or the other. This state, although it be the only one in which there is room for the exercise of judgment or of virtue, is also, from its very condition, subject to mistakes and misconduct. Human passions will interfere, and will cloud the understanding and pervert the principles. Even the gospel is subject to the same laws as regulate all the affairs, in which man and his interests are concerned. And, in so far as it has been committed to the agency of men, it has been committed to beings always fallible,

often weak, and sometimes ill designing; under whose misguidance it has frequently been checked in its course, and subjected to many failures and miscarriages.

A short retrospect of the principal circumstances, which have hitherto checked the progress of the gospel, will best serve to explain our views on this subject.

The severest wound, that has yet been inflicted on the Christian cause, has, perhaps, been the Mahometan apostasy. Much, unquestionably, of the success, that attended the pretended prophet, must be ascribed to the political weakness of the Byzantine empire. Still, viewing his extraordinary enterprise as a question of religion, we must perceive that the Cross could not have yielded so easy a triumph to the Crescent, but for the faults of the professors of the gospel. The real dangers and the hardest trials of Christianity did not commence, till after the empire had become Christian, when temporal prosperity relaxed the nerves of religion. The great characteristic, that marked the eastern churches, was the love of a subtle and

disputatious theology. Endowed with an acute intellect, and possessed of a language singularly adapted by its copiousness and flexibility to verbal disputes, the learned wasted their powers in examining, as with a microscopic scrutiny, subjects almost too fine for human vision; while, at the same time, they pursued the differences of opinion, that could hardly fail to arise out of such minute investigations, with an animosity and a violence, most unbecoming the sacred cause in which they were engaged. As, too, these questions had, in many instances, but little connection with the proper business of man, viz. practical godliness, they tended to divert the attention both of themselves and of the people from things to words, from obedience to the laws of the gospel to metaphysical refinements in the interpretation of it. Accordingly, the general practice of the times appears to have been degenerate and corrupt to a dreadful degree; varying between the extremes of licentiousness and of a wild and fanatical spirit, that made devotion consist in the maceration of the body, in

unauthorized rigours, in unnatural abstractions, and in delirious mysticism. This general corruption, again, must have tended to weaken the whole structure of civil society, as well as to injure the more immediate interests of Christianity. And after these considerations we may be less surprised to find, that, when the bold impostor of Mecca had proclaimed his mission from heaven, his armed apostles were able, in the course of a few years, to wrest from the allegiance to Christ so large a portion of his empire, and even to possess themselves of the very countries, which the Saviour had ennobled and sanctified by his personal ministry. The disastrous fate of those countries may not, however, be without its profit to the cause of Christianity, if it convince us that a restless, a rash, a litigious curiosity on the more intricate questions of theology produces the worst effects on the understanding and temper of the professors of the gospel. And if this spirit generally prevail, and be combined, at the same time, with causes otherwise unfavourable to the gospel, (such as are ig-

norance and dissoluteness of manners,) it exposes Christianity to the onset of the first daring invader; or, as may be a more rational apprehension in the present state of the world, to the less open, but not less fatal, machinations of infidelity.

If from the eastern we turn our view to the western churches, we shall still see that their internal corruptions have been a principal cause, that has long obstructed, and still obstructs, the progress and the beneficial influence of Christianity. In the course of these Lectures, I have already had occasion to trace the origin and early growth of the papal system. And if, in that inquiry, I have been led to give a less unfavourable account of its commencement than is often given, and have supposed that it arose from a propitious conjuncture of circumstances, rather than from any deep plan projected and foreseen at the beginning by its first founders; if, too, I have expressed a belief, that, in its earlier stages, it had some beneficial influence on the peculiar state of society then existing; no one can be more sensible than myself of the

pernicious corruptions, which it afterwards contracted. The predominant vice of the papal system has been the conversion of religion into an engine for the acquisition of secular power. As of pagan, so of papal Rome the leading principle has been,

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento.

While the eastern patriarchs were reviling and persecuting each other, upon abstruse points of theology, their brethren in the west, disembarrassed from the presence of a temporal sovereign, were extending their influence over kings and emperors. While the monks of Syria were exciting a stupid admiration by a fruitless waste of existence on the top of a pillar, those of the west, in a climate less suited for such fantastic and unprofitable exercises, were employed more gainfully in amassing wealth and acquiring power. To the purposes of gaining influence and authority, even the theological heresies of the church of Rome were chiefly subservient. That the word of God might not obstruct its ambitious designs, other rules of faith were added to the scriptures, and the scriptures them-

selves were refused to the laity. That there might be a body of men abstracted from domestic cares and avocations, and devoted exclusively to the furtherance of their professional influence, the clergy were forbidden to engage in matrimony. Still farther to exalt the dignity, and by consequence to augment the power, of the clerical order, they were represented as handling in the sacred elements the very body of the Saviour of the world, and as possessing influence over the state and condition of souls in another life. Their immunity from civil jurisdiction, and their claim to dispose of the crowns and sceptres of earthly sovereigns, added still farther weight to the clergy; while the fear of losing the valuable prerogatives, which they had obtained, induced a spirit of intolerance and persecution, foreign from the true genius of the gospel. In the members of the clerical body themselves, this exorbitant and unrestrained power generated, as might have been expected, a shameful profligacy of conduct. And in its effects upon others, upon the general interests of Christianity,

the result will appear to have been most pernicious. If we look to the attempts made by the servants of such a church to *convert the heathen*, we shall find them too often directed to the promotion of papacy rather than of Christianity, and, for this purpose, so shaped, that, if they appear specious and expedient at first, they are little calculated, and have experimentally been found to be little calculated, to advance the solid and permanent interests of the gospel. If we wish to know the results of such a system *within the pale of Christianity*, we may perceive them by looking to the states that still maintain the most zealous adherence to the Romish church, where we shall see that church generally in close alliance with civil despotism; where we shall see the lower orders, for the most part, involved in ignorance and prejudice; and the higher orders too often knowing little of religion but the outward form, if not covering secret infidelity under the garb of a strict observance of ceremonial rites. And, *in general*, the system has created so much suspicion and distrust of

the religion on which it has attached itself, that, if the youthful inquirer be driven into infidelity, we shall often find that he has been scared by the corruptions of the Romish church; if he attempt to propagate his infidel opinions, he paints the lineaments of that church, and then sets forth his picture, with all its deformities, as a faithful portrait of genuine Christianity.

The cases of the Mahometan and the papal apostasies have been taken, because they form each a subject so distinct and prominent, that it may be easily submitted to examination; and also because they appear to be the greatest calamities that have yet befallen the church of Christ, and, consequently, afford the strongest illustration of the principle, which we would establish; viz. that the slow progress, which the gospel has yet made, is mainly attributable to the fault of the human agents, to whom it has been committed.

But we may farther, and in a more general way, remark, that the vices of other communities and individuals, professing themselves Christians, have had a most si-

nister influence upon the progress and diffusion of Christianity. In every Christian society, too many have proved that the faith, which they profess, has had little practical influence on their lives; too many have even made its doctrines and precepts, by a strange perversion, the instruments for gratifying passions, which Christianity abhors and forbids. And these corruptions have done more towards obstructing the cause and the influence of the gospel, than all the opposition of all its adversaries, from its earliest promulgation to the present day.

But, as the gospel has long been left to be propagated and advanced by man, with all his imperfections on his head,—so we hope it may also feel, in another respect, the operation of those laws, which regulate the ordinary transactions of our kind. In most human transactions we find that knowledge must be bought; that success is the result of practice and experience. Seldom is any thing great or valuable achieved without disappointment at the commencement. Our earliest efforts generally prove

abortive. We attempt processes, which fail of success; we try roads, which we find do not lead to the object in view. But from repeated failures we gain wisdom. We learn what should be avoided, as well as what should be sought. Every error exposed is an accession to the cause of truth. Every rock and quicksand, marked upon our moral chart, serves to direct our future course with greater safety.

So it may be with respect to religion. In the times that have passed since the gospel has been committed to the ordinary agency of man, it has felt the ill effects of several false steps that have been taken. But till certain measures have been tried, and not perhaps till then, can we either be completely convinced of their inefficacy and danger, or be properly set on our guard against them. The errors now in question may prove not unprofitable, if we will learn wisdom from the experience of the past. And a very cursory view of certain grievous evils which have befallen Christianity, as, on the one side, it has pointed out some of the sources from

whence those evils have sprung, may, on the other side, make us wiser, and enable us to pursue a safer course, for the time to come.

Looking, then, to past events, and thence endeavouring to discover the erroneous principles, which have had the greatest influence in checking the progress of the gospel, we shall be little liable to be mistaken in naming especially the following: 1st, The excessive fondness for discussion at once minute and acrimonious on points of theology, which have but a remote influence on practice: secondly, the vain endeavour to improve upon the gospel, as we have received it from the hands of its divine author, by human additions: thirdly, the false notion, that Christianity thrives best in the soil of ignorance, or should be propagated by any arts but those of persuasion and legitimate argument: fourthly, the dangerous attempt to make Christianity a mere engine for the acquisition of secular power.

It is not meant that these are the sole errors that have obstructed the progress of

the gospel. But these certainly are very prominent ones. Nor can we expect that the cause of divine truth should have its full and promised operation, until vices, from which it has suffered so much, shall be known and exposed. Neither is it intended to be said, that if these errors should be completely exploded, others, and others of an opposite tendency, may not arise. When we reflect upon our constant propensity to mistake reverse of wrong for right; when we recollect that we are apt, after abandoning one error, to start aside into an opposite, but not less wide, deviation from the exact line of truth; these considerations should make us ever vigilant and cautious. In fact, such has often been the flux and reflux of human opinions, that a skilful observer of mankind may be led, from a mere knowledge of the erroneous opinions that have lately become obsolete, to foresee the exact character and description of those, against which it behoves him next to be on his guard. I would, therefore, by no means wish to be understood as intending to say, that the reign of error and passion is likely

to end on earth; or that man will altogether cease *to judge after the sight of his eyes, or to reprove after the hearing of his ears* [c].

But, without running into wild and visionary expectations; without losing sight of that sobriety of judgment, which should be especially exerted in all our speculations on the future; it does appear to be a circumstance highly favourable to our hopes, that certain erroneous principles, which hitherto have materially hurt the cause of the gospel, appear now to be much on the decline. It is also highly favourable, that, at the present time, there should be in operation various other circumstances, and circumstances of no little moment, which seem to promise to the gospel a wider diffusion and a more powerful influence, than it has ever yet obtained.

Our preceding inquiries have already led us to see, that, in many respects, the external condition of the world is, at present, auspicious to the great cause of the gospel. The barriers, which have separated distant re-

[c] Isaiah xi. 3.

gions, are fast breaking down. The spirit of commercial enterprise, and the new facilities for rapid communication, which give so much vigour and animation to that spirit, have a tendency to make the whole world, as it were, one country. The lead, which in these enterprises is taken by nations the best instructed in religious and in civil knowledge, promises to give a wider circulation to the blessings, which they themselves enjoy. In fact, the temples of paganism appear to be tottering on many sides. A light is also breaking in on Mahometan and papal darkness; and, however the lovers of darkness may *take counsel together*, however they may arouse themselves for a while to activity and zeal, it is a light, which they will find it impossible to extinguish, or, eventually, to exclude from their own precincts.

As, too, the cause of genuine Christianity has hitherto been found to advance with the advance of general knowledge, we feel no apprehensive forebodings,—on the contrary, we draw the most animating and exhilarating hopes, from observing the im-

mense progress, which the human mind in late times has made in science, physical and moral.

In looking to the physical sciences, I should bewilder myself in an interminable labyrinth, if I were to attempt the slightest summary of the progress which they have made, since the establishment of the true principles, on which the investigation of nature should be prosecuted. As specimens and examples, let us only advert to two sciences; the one, that, by which the heavens are now submitted to human vision, and the movements of the celestial lights calculated with a precision, serviceable in numberless respects to our daily use; the other, that, which, by its acquaintance with the laws of analysis and combination, has made almost all the material creation subservient to the accommodation and enjoyment of man. And, when we have considered the present state of those sciences, let us then recollect, that scarcely two centuries have elapsed since they were chiefly conversant, the first in studying the lights of heaven with a view to their supposed in-

fluence on the human destiny; the second, in investigating the action of metals and salts, with a view of obtaining certain secrets for the acquisition of inexhaustible wealth, or for the prolongation of life for an endless term of years; in a word, since astronomy was astrology, and chemistry was alchemy.

So, in moral science, that we may keep within some bounds, let us not attempt to trace the variety of erroneous and pernicious doctrines, the admiration of past times, that are now abandoned. Let us confine our view to two points; and the rather, because they both are visibly pregnant with the most important consequences to the future welfare of society, and are no less visibly connected with the probable enlargement of the Christian religion.

The time appears to be close at hand, when it will be admitted by universal consent, that the commercial intercourse between foreign countries should be unrestricted. On this point, of course I do not at present speak as a question of political economy. I look to its moral effects. I look to its manifest tendency to diminish

the frequency of wars, by making it the obvious and palpable interest of nations to cultivate peace with each other. I look also to its tendency to promote an easier intercourse between independent and distant regions, by which it is not in the nature of things that the wiser and more enlightened states should not, slowly perhaps and imperceptibly, but substantially, give the tone and character to others, less advanced in useful knowledge.

The other great point to which I alluded is the education of the lower orders of the community. This is an incalculable acquisition to the great cause of human improvement, if it were only by the mass of latent and unsuspected talent, which it must infallibly bring into useful activity. But this is not all. No one class of society can be amended or deteriorated without affecting that, to which it immediately adjoins. And the more intellectual cultivation of the humbler classes must, eventually, have the effect of imposing on their superiors the necessity of making a correspondent and proportionable progress in all that is *lovely*

and of good report, if it were only for the purpose of maintaining their relative elevation and their proper influence in society.

Neither is it likely that the advance, which has been made in these, and some other great points connected with the improvement of our nature, should at any future period be lost. They are acquisitions which have been made slowly, and by dint of much contention of mind, on the part of their advocates. And slowly, it is probable, and only by continued exertions, can they be farther extended. But the steps, that have been taken in advance, are, we trust, secure. Delusive and visionary systems may be,—they assuredly *will* be,—transitory and evanescent. But the great principles, to which we have above adverted, are too deeply founded on truth and justice, they are too closely connected with the welfare and improvement of mankind, to make us apprehensive that they will ever be subverted. As, in the mechanical inventions, we see that the luxuries of one age are the conveniences of a second, and the necessities of a third; while in their obvious

utility we have a sufficient security that they never can cease to be in use:—so we may observe that various speculations, originally conceived by the "prophetic" mind of some highly-gifted individual, have passed first into probabilities perceived by the more enlighted few, and thence into certain and universally admitted axioms of truth. And, to give us confidence in their security and durability, we look to that most powerful instrument, the press, which makes it as sure as any thing in human affairs can be sure, that the ground, once gained, will never be lost; that just principles, once established, will never become obsolete; that mankind will not, at any future period, retrograde from truth to error, from light to darkness.

If we believe that our holy religion is so founded on eternal truth, that every acquisition in real science will serve only to confirm and signalize it; if we believe that it is so intimately connected with the best interests of mankind, that whatever advances the general welfare of our species must also advance the cause of Christianity; it should seem that the progress of knowledge and

the farther and better cultivation of the human intellect, must tend to promote both the external profession, and, what is much more important, the operative influence of the gospel. I certainly do not suppose that we shall witness a literal accomplishment of the prophecies, which say, *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: nation shall not lift up the sword against nation. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord*[d]. But it surely is hardly consistent with a belief in holy writ, to doubt that, at some period, the Messiah's reign shall be widely extended on the earth. And as little does it seem to accord with actual experience, to deny that there is now a decided, and a decidedly visible, tendency to a wider diffusion and to a better recognition of the principles of the gospel, than has been witnessed, to say the least, for a long time past.

And so, having thus far traced the progress and developement of the great scheme of di-

[d] Isaiah xi. 6. ii. 4. lxv. 25.

vine revelation as it relates to this world, we may perceive in part accomplished, and tending apparently to a fuller accomplishment, its supreme and ultimate design, viz. its design to be introductory to a nobler order of things hereafter. As each of the earlier dispensations of religion led the way to the succeeding one, and, revealing to man more and more of the great counsel of God, enabled him to render a better obedience to the divine law; so we believe the Christian dispensation, the last that shall be communicated in this world, was designed to advance man to such a state of improvement in his human nature as he can receive; to restore him as nearly as he can now hope to approach to the similitude of God; and, by this process, to make him once more *meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light*[e]. As the gospel has given him a fuller knowledge of divine things; as it has instructed him more correctly in the nature of his obligations in this world; as it has furnished him with more cogent mo-

[e] Coloss. i. 12.

tives for the performance of his earthly duties; and as it has procured for him additional aids to carry his knowledge into practice; in these respects, it surely has been designed, and has been calculated, to advance him in his moral nature; and, unless the views which I have taken in the preceding Lectures are altogether erroneous, may we not venture to pronounce that, in fact, it has so advanced him? And thus it appears, the link, that connects the present system of things with the future world, is begun to be formed. Of the nature of the life to come we know but little; nor, with our present faculties, is it possible that here we should know much. But every thing tells us that the course, by which this world is governed, is preparatory and introductory to that, which is to follow. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, sets forth at large how the various ordinances and institutions of the Jewish church were adumbrations of the more spiritual worship, to be established under the gospel. In like manner it may be said, that the clearer knowledge respecting the divine na-

ture vouchsafed to us by the gospel, prepares us for the beatific vision, hereafter to be presented to our eyes, when we shall see God *face to face*. The additional motives and aids for the performance of our earthly duties, now imparted, tend to fit us for that state, where it shall be our employment to *serve God day and night in his temple*[f]. The pure and serene pleasures enjoyed by the pious Christian, in the humble hope of his acceptance with God, are a foretaste of those future enjoyments, *when he shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on him, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed him, and shall lead him unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes*[g]. And, once more, the celebration of the name of Christ over the earth is an earnest of that scene, prophetically beheld by the beloved apostle; when *he heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders. And the num-*

[f] Rev. vii. 15. [g] Rev. vii. 16, 17.

ber of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature, which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever [h].

To these passages, so magnificent, so awfully sublime, it is almost sacrilege to add a word. Nor will I add more than one brief observation, with which I would wish to conclude this humble, this very humble, attempt to illustrate the manner, in which the Almighty has developed the great scheme of divine revelation. We may distinctly perceive the process, by which God has dealt forth his successive dispensations of religion to mankind, adapting them to the condition and circumstances of the

[h] Rev. v. 11, 12, 13.

world at the time; making each a suitable instrument for the introduction of something farther; and, by this wise arrangement, tending to the point which we believe him ever to have had in view, viz. not only the spiritual salvation of fallen man, but his progressive improvement in this stage of his existence. All this we may distinctly perceive; and, on a view of the actual state of the world, we may see, or fancy we see, that the word of God now *runs and is glorified*, and promises yet *more mightily to grow and prevail*, till it shall extend its triumphs over all lands. But still there is a question of paramount interest, that concerns us all individually and personally;—how far shall each one of us partake of everlasting salvation? The kingdom of God may extend itself to the utmost limits of the earth; yet we, severally, may be shut out. It is only by a life of righteousness; by a life holy, just, and pure, in proportion to our allotted measure of knowledge and ability, that we can secure our own salvation, through the merits of the crucified Redeemer. And, as Christianity identifies the

true interests of individuals with the interests of the general cause of religion, it is only by such a course that we can contribute our personal aid toward that great consummation, when, *the earth being full of the knowledge of the Lord*[i], it shall be ripe to be absorbed into another and a more glorious system, *when there shall be new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*[k].

[i] Isaiah xi. 9. [k] 2 Pet. iii. 13.

THE END.

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